MOSCOW DIARY

The diary kept by Marjorie Farquharson during the period in which she established Amnesty International's Information Office in Moscow

MARJORIE FARQUHARSON

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Annotation

Moscow Diary is the diary kept by Marjorie Farquharson during the period in which she established Amnesty International's Information Office in Moscow, a unique venture during a fascinating period of change. In 1991, Marjorie was the first westerner working on human rights with a permanent base. It was particularly important because for years the USSR had considered Amnesty an anti-Soviet organisation – "a nest of spies" so to speak. Marjorie's role together with her penetrating perceptions and her entertaining style of writing make this a very interesting account which combines insights into the politics of human rights and into the unusually wide range of people Marjorie encountered. Most westerners in Moscow lived a life apart with access to foreign currency shops and good-quality food. Marjorie chose instead to live as an ordinary Muscovite, in one room with a small kitchen, even when, in 1992, the inflation rate in Russia soared to more than 2000%. The fact that the diary was written 25 years ago doesn't in any way undermine the author's efforts to help Russia become "a normal country", nor does it hide the author's true passion for the Russian people. A gem of a book capturing a moment in time by a truly humble, self-sacrificing woman.

- Marjorie Farquharson
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Marjorie Farquharson
MOSCOW DIARY

"A good traveller has no fixed plans,
and is not intent on arriving."

Laozi

THE FIRST EIGHT WEEKS: JANUARY–MARCH 1991

Thursday 24 January

While our wheels are being changed at Brest-Litovsk I'll take advantage of the pause to write this diary.

My visa came through after four days' delay. The Moscow Foreign Ministry said, "Strange things are happening, particularly in the London Consulate. This is not the first time…" The official at the USSR Embassy asked me to come and collect it at the "KGB centre, 18 Kensington Palace Gardens". This was either a slip of the tongue or refreshing candour on his part.

It has been a very interesting ride so far. The Belgian ticket collector said, "Moscow? Give my greetings to Gorbachev", and the carriage laughed. Later, while I was killing six hours at Köln station, next to a fruit machine that played 'Ode to Joy', a Pole sitting with me said, "Gorbachev?" and made a fifty-fifty motion with his hand. The last person to comment was a West African in my sleeper, who said, "Give Gorbachev my best wishes", before pulling the blanket over his head.

I woke up in Poland, where I have spent the last twelve hours. It looked sodden. In 1975 I remember it looked the poorest country we travelled through. I still saw some old steam engines, and a man with his horse at a well, but the station buildings were newly painted and the fields looked neat. There were also some new cars on the road. The Poles I travelled with were remarkably quiet: not eating, not speaking, just reading and saying "goodbye" nicely when they got off. Vivid contrast to three immensely physical Russians who got on after Poznan and had us all shifting our things etc.

Changed trains at Warsaw to catch the train I should have got at Oostende. It was an immense battle for me and every other passenger to be allowed on, even though we had our tickets and reservations etc. I somehow wasn't prepared for Soviet bureaucracy to start on Platform 4, Warsaw station. Once I was on the steward became very pleasant and amusing. He was reading *Moscow News*.

Friday 25 January

When I woke up we were travelling through rural Belorussia. There were trees pressing at the window, blue sky, snow on the ground, and every so often we'd pass a village. This is a fantastic way to travel and a fantastic way to arrive.

It was -7 degrees in Moscow and I was met by my landlord and his wife, she in an expensive black fur coat. In the cab home they

were discussing how the 50- and 100-rouble notes had been withdrawn from circulation almost overnight. Apparently it was meant somehow to hit black marketeers, but it also wiped out pensioners' savings at a stroke. The landlord's wife was anxious to divest me of all the things I'd brought them as rent. When I told her I'd sent them ahead of me she wanted me to ring the shipping company there and then. As she was going through the list of things, she saw my jacket and said, "I wanted one like that", looked again, then said, "Oh, no, it's cheap".

The landlord seemed to have a change of heart later on – brought me some bedding, food and an iron. He told me there are rumours that the 10- and 25-rouble notes will also disappear. I put on the radio and heard Galina Starovoytova's familiar voice. She said it was hard to imagine anyone further to the right than the President, or *who* could hold a gun to his head and say, "OK, it's your life, or tanks in Lithuania."

Saturday 26 January

Today they announced there would be joint army and police patrols in major cities at night, public holidays and possibly weekends. The KGB also got new powers to investigate economic crimes.

There were snowstorms all day. I caught up on my *Izvestiya* subscription. They have called this year, "The Year of the Market", and are carrying a rags-to-riches story on the front page. I came to like their foreign news coverage – particularly of the Gulf, which they see as a political issue rather than a military one. Radio Moscow announced major price rises in Georgia and said it was price rises like these that had "led to the disturbances in the Baltic". I wonder if Georgia's the next to get it in the neck.

Bloody hours of football on the World Service as I cleaned the bathroom.

Sunday 27 January

I thought I was being woken by someone's ornamental clock in the morning, but realised it was church bells, presumably ringing from the church down the road. It was returned to believers a couple of years ago and has since been restored. Church bells were illegal until 1988.

It was a beautiful day: blue sky, deep frost and -16 degrees. It was so cold my face hurt by the time I turned out of the courtyard into the street. Went to visit Yelena's mother and give her photos of their wedding party in October. She took such pleasure in looking at them it gave me pleasure just to watch her. She said the first frost always comes around the Feast of the Baptism, which has just passed. Apparently believers take a container to church to receive water that has been blessed. Yelena was arrested at the beginning of the Feast of

the Baptism in 1984 and so her mother never got her container to church that year.

There is something very clean and peaceful about their flat. I stayed about three hours and she told me some interesting things about old Moscow. She insisted on giving me sheets, a blanket, pans, plates and cutlery, her own grapefruit jam and some mayonnaise someone had given her from Tomsk. A lovely person.

The cold was exhausting so I didn't go out again in the evening. Alksnis of the "Soyuz" faction in Parliament was threatening there will be civil war in the Baltics which will spread through the USSR. He blamed Gorbachev for not going the whole way and imposing presidential rule. The radio is now denying rumours that 25-rouble notes will be withdrawn. However, a number of shops are not taking them.

Monday 28 January

I've spent the whole day tied to the house, waiting for my advance luggage to arrive. I phoned them at 9.00am. A nice guy came to pick up papers at 2.00pm and it's now 6.00pm. I've been reading Dennis Healey's autobiography; he said when he addressed the City at the Mansion House, his wife had to sit upstairs in the gallery "like a medieval leper, listening to a sermon from his squint".

Tuesday 29 January

Because it was snowing I could see a path people take, off the beaten track. It turned out to be a shortcut to the metro and takes you through a lovely glade in front of the church. There's also a fruit and veg shop hidden away there.

This morning I went to the local sorting office to open a PO box for Amnesty mail. Two women who were sifting mail in a dilatory sort of way ignored me for 4–5 minutes, then I eventually got to speak to the chief postmistress. She said she would contact me when a box came free and asked me to jot down my details. I deliberately said that I was on a visit sponsored by the Foreign Ministry, and suddenly she brought me all the forms and a key, and even got a towel to dust the box (!). To give her her due, she had been very civil before I mentioned the Foreign Ministry. The box cost 48 roubles (£4.80) for the year.

Had a very interesting lunch with Valentina, who also sent me away with sheets and pillowcases. She said she had been non-political all her life until the first real elections in 1989, when she went to a ward meeting to nominate twenty-three candidates and noticed the list was rigged. She stood up and pointed it out, and got nominated herself. In her nomination speech she had said she was for Sakharov, Yeltsin, Afanasyev – and added in English because she couldn't think of the Russian, "for human rights too". That and the demonstration on

25 February last year were two of the biggest events of her life. The third was when Sakharov was howled down in Parliament for his comments on Afghanistan. Valentina doesn't like foreign radio stations because they sound condescending and she got tired of people foisting their views on her in Britain. Cautionary advice to me.

Unexpected visit from the landlord when I got back. He's preparing forms to register me with the police and thinks it will take *two weeks*. Ye gods! He talked non-stop for 1.5 hours and I watched his face working away, then suddenly breaking into a smile. Then he abruptly left with no goodbye – very tall, in a fur hat and big boots. It was exhausting – a sort of whizz through the *Financial World Tonight*. He goes on so much about how poor he is that I find I start doing it myself.

Entertaining dinner with a visiting Quaker, who has lost a stone since she came here in November and has only seen two pints of milk. Sent me away with frozen pineapples.

Felt immensely happy today.

Wednesday 30 January

My luggage arrived before breakfast and I spent the day assembling it, unable to fit the last screw into the arm of my IKEA easychair. The landlord and his wife came, to start the process of registering me with the block superintendent, the district finance department and the local police. After two hours Sasha had made some progress, but before the police can register me they need documents from the Visa and Registration Department, so I'll have to go there tomorrow.

Sasha was looking like a boyar, in long coat with fur lapels and high fur hat. Yuliya stayed with me for the two hours and we had mutual difficulty understanding each other. She pointed to the black sisal plant-pot holder she had macraméd, and said, "That's horrible isn't it?" Apparently the Ambassador's wife in Tanzania had got all the Soviet wives making things out of macramé – even tables and chairs.

I do so little here, so slowly, that I began to feel overwhelmed by what faces me. In the evening I sketched out an advert for AI, which I hope we can place in the press, along with the new PO box number.

Thursday 31 January

When people here say it is 30 degrees, they mean -30 degrees, which is what it was today.

I have discovered that a Soviet courier service will take mail for £10, instead of the $60 which DHL asks. I took the tube and a bus to the main Warsaw highway and tottered with my mail to the International Post Office. Prices have gone up: the courier apparently cost £9 last week.

I then made for the Visa and Registration Department (UVIR) in

the centre of town, everything looking absolutely lovely in deep snow and a pink light. Found UVIR had moved from Kolpachny Pereulok and left no sign saying where to. Eventually tracked them down at the end of Chernyshevsky Street, to find they were shut. Far from the metro I couldn't face more walking, so caught a bus – foolishly as it turned out, because it crawled along the ring road for about fifty minutes and I got chilled to the bone. I really was feeling peculiar by the time I got home and immediately slept. Yelena's mother rang to see how I was coping with the cold and to offer me another blanket.

I put socks and a pair of leg warmers on top of my tights and went off to UVIR again. There was a big disorderly queue, which moved quite quickly. When it got to me, eight or nine people crowded in from all sides, saying they'd got permission to jump the queue, and a big argy-bargy broke out. "Well, I *am* the queue, and I'm next," I said grimly. An African diplomat on my left was playing with a biro which turned into an aerial (?). It turned out UVIR can't provide papers for me, it has to be the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There was great pushing and shoving to get onto the No. 25 bus home and I noticed nine of us, all women, didn't make it. When we eventually caught the next one, we were picking up the female residue at all the stops.

There's a big mirror by my phone in the hall and, what with tiredness and -30 degrees, it looked like ET looming up at me. Out with the cream. I made the mistake of doing "simple" domestic things as an antidote to the day. Decided to replace the split and unsanitary toilet seat with the one I'd brought from home, but could not get the two screws at the back to budge. So now have *no* toilet seat at all.

I can't explain why I find my surroundings so absolutely beautiful. I came home in the dark through the glade behind the church. The mixture of snow, shadows, and shapes in their winter clothing was lovely.

Friday 1 February

Minus 18 degrees today and comparatively warm, although it was today I noticed the inside of my nose was freezing.

I went to the independent weekly journal *Stolitsa* to talk with their editor-in-chief about placing an ad with them. They are also interested in our Prisoner of the Month column. The foreign editor, Vitaly Yerenkov, is a former *Novosti* journalist and very interested in, and interesting about, the international scene. Without any access to agency reports or foreign press, because they can't afford them, he has to write pieces about the Persian Gulf. He had some scathing things to say about the Western press and their actual lack of freedom. At *Novosti* he had watched them eating out of Gennady Gerasimov's – the press spokesman's – hand, totally unwilling and unable to challenge

the US/European consensus that Gorbachev is a “good thing”.

I lunched at Pizza Hut and was almost embraced by a Finnish financial journalist, who was just back from the oppressive, secret and hothouse atmosphere of Nizhny Novgorod. She thrust her garlic bread at me and was anxious to talk. Today is the day Soviet troops start to accompany police on patrols. Troops withdrawn from Central Europe are now massed on the Finnish border and the Finnish armed forces are in a state of low alert. All these things gave her an apocalyptic vision, which I must say I don’t actually share at present. She kept looking at her watch as four o’clock approached, as though she expected the armoured cars to start rolling in.

The dingy half-light in my flat in the evenings drives me mad, so I thought I’d finish setting up my lamps. Repeated last night’s mistake re domestic tasks and decided to transfer some Soviet two-pin plugs onto my things. But whereas UK plugs are fairly compact and smooth inside, everything inside a Soviet plug is loose and wobbles, so that trying to attach the wires is like stepping from one moving boat to another in a high sea. Gave up and wrote this diary. Now my lamps don’t work, nor does the TV, because I removed the plug. As for the toilet seat…

Saturday 2 February

Extremely tired, but decided I would go and strut my stuff at the Moscow Aviation Institute where the Moscow Helsinki Group were holding a seminar. There was a ballroom dancing lesson going on in the hall outside, very much like our own class in Herne Hill – a lot of European hips trying to get their way round the Cha-cha-cha. Moscow Amnesty members had arranged a good stand on “Different Faces of Repression” around the world and I added our Death Penalty Report and UN Codes of Conduct. Extremely chuffed that I sold 20 roubles’ worth.

A woman spoke about the Civil Rights Movement in the USA. It was intelligent, confident, in good Russian, and what people wanted to hear. But I felt very uncomfortable during it. She made it sound like what is laid down in the US constitution and in laws always actually happens. Surely in any study like that you’ve got to look at the people who nevertheless fall through the system and see how that happens too. She made it sound as though it’s all OK, as long as lobby groups are protesting – like they form one cosy whole with the government.

It reminded me of the book *Critical Psychiatry*: in the US psychiatry is treated as a kind of “mental hygiene”, to accommodate the individual to their surroundings – a substitute for any radical political sentiment. I noticed the guy from the Soviet Foreign Ministry walked out.

Tremendous sense of relief when I got home by 6.00pm with

nothing pressing to do for 1.5 days. Actually managed to fix a lamp and wrote letters home. Soviet cosmonauts can see the fighting in the Gulf – fires and smoke.

Sunday 3 February

Slept twelve hours then luxuriated, washing the kitchen walls and listening to a programme of Mongolian throat singing. Quite haunting. Dr Yury Savenko came round in the afternoon and we talked about his Independent Psychiatric Association, then in the evening I went to a Quaker meeting at Tatyana Pavlova's. She, like Savenko, anticipates ten years' totalitarianism, but she does not think there will be civil war. She thinks the army is too strong and united. I wonder. We had a very good Quaker meeting, and both of us ministered in Russian. As she walked me to the metro, she rhapsodised about the weather in February, the promise of spring etc.

Monday 4 February

I could see what she meant today. The air was lighter, the sun brighter, and I could hear birds on the rooftops.

I trekked to the Warsaw Highway again with a courier for London, and thought I would buy food on the way back. No go, Joe. The Danilov Market was closed for cleaning, the fish shop was shut and there was no milk in the milk shop. So I came home with half a kilo of cranberries. I made rather a weird soup from my remnants, then carted the computer to the SOVAM computer firm to discuss setting up an electronic mail link. The guy was nice to me, but shouted at four other people who came in. On my way home I spotted a cabbage in the local shop, darted in, and snaffled it up. Found the landlord waiting for me, wanting to talk.

He is getting edgy about having an AI person as his tenant. He told me a bit about his past: when he was working abroad as an interpreter his wife had a breakdown and had to spend time in a psychiatric hospital. The Foreign Ministry then broke the contract because he and his wife had "spoiled the psychological climate of the collective". "You may not know what that is, but *I* do," he said bitterly, his face twisting all over the place.

He then spent over an hour trying to unscrew the two nuts on my toilet seat and eventually succeeded. He is very thorough and hardworking; his translation for us was the same. After talking non-stop for three hours and predicting catastrophe and floods of refugees, he turned on his heel abruptly and said goodbye.

The Sakharov Committee rang at 11.30pm, just making contact about the commemoration they are staging in May.

Tuesday 5 February

Probably about -12 degrees today, but it felt mild and springlike.

The PO box is becoming a bit of a hostage to fate as there is no

rhyme or reason to when the post office opens or shuts. Today they locked it in front of another woman and me, then heaped abuse at us through the glass. I somehow found it immensely depressing. On top of that I lugged my laundry to the shop, to find it had been closed "for technical reasons" since 5 January. I've also been ringing the Foreign Ministry since Friday but getting the run around. Got very fed up and went to the Pushkin Art Gallery in the afternoon to see the Bernard Buffet exhibition. Pictures of Paris with translucent skies. There are also a few nice Matisses there; when I looked closely I was very struck by what he had painted out.

Went to bed very early with a cracking headache and feeling exhausted. It seemed a very long day today. I spoke to no one and had my first lonely pangs.

Twenty-six army lorries passed me on my way back from the market.

Wednesday 6 February

My ears seem to have unstopped, my brain has switched to Russian, and I was listening to the radio and whizzing through *Izvestiya* with ease. Maybe that's why I've been so tired. Today Sokolenko at the Foreign Ministry was apologetic and said he was still "waiting for an answer" about my specific rights here. He also asked if I'd just been to the Baltic – although I can't imagine how he thinks I would have got there without any documents from him.

Enjoyed myself in the afternoon drafting letters for a mailing list. Thought I'd go and see Clark Gable in *It Happened One Night* at The Illusion. But it didn't happen that night, and I got a mouthful from the ticket seller, because I hadn't understood the programme correctly. So, watched *Waterloo Bridge* instead, a 1950s film about London in the First World War, with London shrouded in fog. The place was packed and all the men and women round me were weeping by the end. I love going to the cinema here because the audience is so attentive. Good night out for 7p.

Thursday 7 February

Still no progress with my accreditation at the Foreign Ministry. More *Izvestiya* reading in the morning. They say Margaret Thatcher will not stand again for Finchley. The courier I expected from London didn't arrive, so eventually I popped out and discovered a funny local shop with motorbike parts and lace shawls hanging on the walls, and jars of stewed fruit on the shelves. Bought stewed grapes for a friend from the UK, who is in bed with bronchitis.

Another scene at the post office today. This time I was joined by a young man who went demented and almost battered the door down, so they let us in.

The IRA fired mortars at No. 10 today.

Friday 8 February

I had thought I would devote this week to fixing the computer and getting my papers from the Foreign Ministry, but there's precious little to show for it. Also, the courier from London has still not arrived, so I couldn't mail our newsletter, or give out the UN materials on the death penalty for translation. On the other hand, I've had good food, my Russian has improved, and I'm working out a bit of a routine.

I've been feeling out of touch with no TV this week, so thought on Monday I'd explore the possibility of getting a small new one from a hard-currency shop – over 1,000 hard roubles (i.e. over £1,000)! So I decided I'd try to get a new tube for the big old set in my room. Went to the local TV repair shop, where the woman shouted at me, twice, that they only repair radios. Today I made the trek down to another TV repair shop, past Tula station. I was taken to the back room to meet Oleg Fyodorovich, an exhausted-looking man in a brown overall, sitting in an office lined with books on Lenin and Soviet labour legislation. He promised me a tube for 238 roubles, but I didn't have enough money with me. Almost everyone I have visited has a large, but defunct, TV. Apparently the tubes began to give out round about the same time.

I went to the Rossiya Hotel to change more money, then thought I would try getting dinner. Walked into the spacious, empty restaurant, and the woman said they were fully booked. Bit of an argy-bargy then I left.

I have been thinking about how I will have to let these constant refusals and defeats just wash over me, without letting them affect my basic drive. It occurs to me that this is what Soviets must be doing all their lives. So it is not easy to know how defeatist, or otherwise, people are being. At the beginning of the week the people I spoke to seemed very defeatist, but who knows?

Visited a friend in her British Council flat in the morning. Comfortable even by London standards.

Saturday 9 February

I passed four nicely dressed people in the street, huddled round a corner, tearing up raw steak.

Amused to see a poster outside the Maly Theatre for an actress celebrating her seventieth birthday and fifty years on the stage. She was starring in *The Living Corpse*.

A handwritten notice went up on our door, inviting all veterans and internationalist fighters and some invalids to a gathering on the block, where they would get some ration cards for 1991. I was jostled on the stairs by an old man wearing medals, dashing out the door, and had to read the notice out to two people whose eyesight wasn't up to it.

The TV "tube" turned out to be the 23" screen and all that goes on behind it. A really nice man at the shop arranged for it to be delivered to me for 60p.

Sunday 10 February

I am fascinated by Fyodor Burlatsky's memoirs, *Leaders and their Advisors*. His mother used to carry a small pistol in her hair (?). They're a bit like Dennis Healey's in that they're a tale with a moral. Healey's moral was that you need planning and a social consensus. Burlatsky's is that he was the rapscallion of the *Kommunist* collective, the one who bucked the system and always favoured democracy, trial by jury etc. His account of Khrushchev is chilling; it's pure gangland murder. But you're not quite sure which gang is doing the telling.

In Soviet style I hung my food out of the window then defrosted the fridge. Bill Millinship took me out shopping then, because we couldn't find a left turn, drove me 13km north to *The Observer* for elevenses. He says he feels he's doing well if he does four things in a morning. I feel I'm doing well if I do two in a day. He also thinks someone high up is protecting the press at the moment.

In the evening I went to the Quakes. I kept talking about food, and Margaret, who's finishing four months here, told me to shut up. Tatyana was describing the seven-week fast the Russian Orthodox observe for Lent and we all suddenly laughed, including her. Only seven weeks? When I plugged in my fridge last thing, it wouldn't work. Hey ho.

Monday 11 February

I dreamt I was cycling up a hill where hay carts and donkeys laden with straw kept stopping or breaking down. I also passed huddles of Soviets darting from market stalls, like a Breughel painting set in the snow in the southern ring road.

Bang on 9.00am my landlord rolled up, wanting to scan the commercial pages of *Kommersant*. He brought the newsletter, translated, and fixed my fridge. Whatever else, he's the most efficient and reliable person I deal with, and that's a relief. Still no courier from London. The Foreign Ministry says there has been some sort of "delay" concerning my status. I took my washing out for its third walk but found no laundry that would take it between here and the Danilov Market. The computer firm needs still more information, so back to square one.

I decided to send a Valentine's telegram today. The bad-tempered woman at the desk couldn't read Latin script and ground to a halt at "y". She got out a transliteration chart which I had to point to, letter by letter, and then an African in the post office entered into the discussion and started saying, "*y grèque* – write it down" etc. We both rounded on him at the same time. A funny little bad-tempered scene

over something that wasn't meant to be bad tempered at all.

Nikolay of the Moscow Amnesty group came round for tea. Both he and Lada are positive and have ideas. "Better an *ignis fatuus* than no *illume* at all." I appreciate that more and more in people. I did before I came here.

Tuesday 12 February

I watched some labourers shifting heavy slabs in the snow. They were wearing padded jackets, heavy boots and balaclavas, and crouched down on their hunkers for a break. The foreman then kissed one of them and held her hand.

I called out a TV repair man today. The young woman at the desk had a permanent scowl and was sitting working with the phone off the hook. I queued for ten minutes, then she suddenly picked up the phone and shouted, "I told you to wait – there are people here!" We all had to say what was wrong with our sets. The woman in front of me said very nicely, "It gives off smoke and smells of burning."

Today the USSR Prime Minister accused the West of preparing economic sabotage to overthrow the Gorbachev government. Why would the West want to overthrow the Gorbachev government? It doesn't make sense even in their own terms.

Had a lovely visit from a UK friend.

Wednesday 13 February

Landlord very excited they've removed border restrictions from Sakhalin, as he thinks this means the Far East will become a Free Enterprise Zone.

I enjoyed my morning reading *Izvestiya* and making a stock list of all my UN materials. Then I went to the Arbat to drop off the Morocco translation at the *Journal of Humanitarian Sciences*. I immediately liked Tanya, the woman who is going to do it. She took me to meet Yevgeny Vladimirovich, the Deputy Editor, just so he could see a real live Amnesty person. He was putting food in his mouth when we came in and was pleasantly embarrassed. They were both charming, anxious to help, and wanted Amnesty to contribute a piece to the journal. However, everything he said was unintentionally offputting, e.g. "Since the war the Soviet state has invited lots of foreigners here, but it's always ended badly, and they've been accused of espionage…", or, "It's like the Tarzan films and you are Jane…"

I was too late to meet John and go to a film about Chernobyl, but in the end I came across some of the real thing at Viktor's house. A strapping man in his twenties came to stay and it turned out he had been off sick for eighteen months and was now on his way to Donetsk in Ukraine for medical treatment. He had spent two weeks in Belorussia during the Chernobyl disaster and now "something is not quite right with his blood".

The evening at Viktor's was like something from Dostoyevsky, and made me quite tense. They are fairly hard up, and a pigeon walks backwards and forwards from the kitchen to the main room. Their ninety-two-year-old grandmother, whom everyone ignored or shunted out of the way, sat in the corner talking to it. When I first arrived a pediatrician was there, who made some disparaging remarks about AI. Viktor's mother went mad at him and tiraded on, while Viktor and I talked. Then the man with leukemia arrived and later, as he took me to the metro, we passed a woman in the dark on the landing whose face looked familiar to me. We went back in, and spent another hour with Lydia Zapevalova, whose son was sentenced to death in 1989. There were lots of rows and fights all evening, and Viktor kept going for a lie down because he felt so lousy. Anyway the good news is that thirty people have formed an anti-death penalty committee in Moscow. Viktor has ideas for getting Amnesty some premises.

Thursday 14 February

This morning the landlord took my breath away. I said how very nicely Soviet children are brought up compared with ours. He said that is because we have sold out to capitalism, but they are "building socialism and so have to be better". I couldn't believe this was coming from his lips. He then said he disapproved of pornography, but there was something flickering across his face which belied what he said.

I had a satisfying morning writing to a member of the Belorussian Clemency Commission who wants contact with other abolitionists. I then got some juice, bread and nice apples and, "Dizzy with Success", took my laundry for its fourth outing. The dry cleaners took my jeans – 8p and ready in a week. The laundry, however, was just closing and I had to unpack all my things in a great hurry. Then it turned out I needed cloth number tags stitched onto every corner. She wouldn't let me ink the number on myself. So I had to repack my laundry and run with it from door to door in what was now a small blizzard, trying to find out where to buy these bloody number tags. In the end I had to take my laundry with me into town to meet some of the Amnesty members. Several smiles on the train and Nikolay said, "I don't mean to be rude, but you look very picturesque carrying that bag."

Unexpectedly Semyon Gluzman phoned with Svetlana Polubinskaya, both back from Kiev and here to discuss the new draft law on psychiatry at the Supreme Soviet tomorrow. After years when nobody cared about psychiatry, they say everybody is getting a bend on to try to pre-empt the Review Committee, which the World Psychiatric Association is sending here for an inspection in March.

I went round to Polubinskaya's and enjoyed myself very much, hearing their slant on the political scene, both of them gradualists,

totally immersed in psychiatric issues. Polubinskaya co-drafted the new law on psychiatry and since October has been sitting on the Supreme Soviet committee which is slowly pulling it to pieces. They've only covered six articles so far, mostly preamble. I was struck by the fact that she does all this basically from the bedroom in her flat. She offered me her washing machine and will also get me on her hairdresser's list.

I had a very lucky escape tonight. On the way home I heard steps behind me in the snow, turned round and saw a man in a blue anorak gaining on me. I then changed my direction and realised he was aiming for me. We stopped and faced each other out and I screamed. No one came and he started saying, "Go on, louder. That's better. No one will come. You'll damage your throat." I screamed five times and each time he looked round, then stepped closer. I had my eyes absolutely fixed on his and eventually said, "Leave me alone." As I dreaded, he said, "Are you not Russian? Where are you from?" When I told him, he said, "Excuse me", and walked away. I thought he would have gone for my money too. My throat is sore as I write this.

Friday 15 February

I had difficulty getting the man out of my head for the first part of the day. When I was looking him in the eye I kept trying to see him as a whole person. I slept late, slept in the afternoon, and went to bed early.

In the morning I stitched number tags on eleven sheets and towels, conscious that I was probably doing it wrong for the laundry woman. Sure enough, there on the laundry wall was a large chart showing you how it had to be done, but mine were alright. In the afternoon I popped into the post office, to hear my lady of the PO box explaining to some disgruntled customers that they keep getting contradictory instructions from on high and "we don't know which God to pray to". Maybe that's why the door keeps opening and shutting like a fridge.

Because Saddam Hussein made a peace proposal, Hella had to write an article about it for her newspaper and so cancelled dinner. To its credit, the USSR Committee for Constitutional Supervision has pointed out three major illegalities in the presidential decrees on joint army and police patrols, according to *Izvestiya*.

Saturday 16 February

I was invited to a grand lunch at Viktor's, where I would meet Anna Yevgenievna Bochko, a new defence lawyer who is appealing against the death sentence passed on Andrey Zapevalov. She is a specialist in murder cases, in her late twenties, and apparently very clear thinking.

By the time I arrived, Viktor's mother and Mrs Zapevalova were

driving each other mad in the kitchen. It was a huge five-hour lunch with salads, homemade mushroom *pirozhki*, fish, homemade *pelmeni* and sour cream homemade tort, and tea made from handpicked and dried grasses. Lia Davidovna described how she'd swapped some potatoes for some meat and a teapot for some flour etc., and they all said they do the same thing. Everyone was very nice to the children there, particularly Viktor and his mother, who have a real talent. Lia Davidovna explained to them that if it hadn't been for the Germans they wouldn't have their crystal light fixture. The Germans invaded Kharkov, built a casino with chandeliers, destroyed it when they left, and Lia Davidovna's grandmother salvaged one remaining light shade.

Lydia Zapevalova got very tearful as the afternoon wore on. I suddenly saw for myself what an agony the death penalty is for all the relatives concerned. It had been two years for her.

I came home with half a pig.

Sunday 17 February

I was waiting for a UK friend outside the House of Shoes at 3.00pm when a taxi mounted the pavement and drove into a blind man's leg. The poor old guy was shocked and could hardly walk because his leg was so sore, but the driver got out and shouted at him. We got his number and someone went for the police. Jane arrived in a bad way, having just had an obscene phone call. We had a very pleasant stroll in the Sparrow Hills then tea at her house. On my way back I heard three or four dull explosions in the distance. Everyone in the street looked round.

In the underpass at Oktyabrskaya I passed an accordionist standing by petitions to save Ilya Zaslavsky as the chief of the local soviet. The music was wistful and people were signing by lamplight, as though they were in some film. I'm getting a bit sceptical about these petition drives. It seems his council, including many ex-supporters, are wanting him out. Isn't that democracy?

In the evening I went to an Amnesty meeting with Nikolay and Aleksandr, to discuss the Women's Campaign. When I got home I was moved by a note which Lydia Zapevalova had left in my door. She had had difficulty finding my address, and wanted me to forgive her for not turning up in time. She had also left some dried mushrooms for me and gave a recipe for making soup, which ended, "At least, that's how I do it. You may know a better way." It was kind and dignified and humble, and quite upset me.

Monday 18 February

I have to devise a way of getting rid of the half side of pig given to me on Saturday.

A big box arrived for me today from London with a lot of stuff in it, but still no January newsletter. I was almost apoplectic all morning.

I felt my blood pressure was just about up near the ceiling and I couldn't get it down. I couldn't do the mailing I want and I couldn't get through to the Foreign Ministry, the computer firm, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* or *Stolitsa*.

However, I picked myself up, brushed myself off and in the afternoon went to Prospekt Mira, where Maria Esmont has an association of independent women artists. I met her at the Moscow Book Fair in 1989 – a middle-aged woman, very interested in our work. The association has just been given permanent exhibition space in a veterans' club – rather a seedy room, but some nice paintings. They owed it to a hearty woman on the local soviet. The administrative-command system is not dead, because she came in and told them how they should rehang their paintings.

Maria invited me to talk to their committee at 5.00pm and explain our Women's Campaign, which I was glad to do. There was a nice laid-back, women's-group atmosphere. Maria is quiet with a firm voice, and although people kept making comments out of the corner of their mouths ("What about the veterans?", "What will the woman from the District Soviet think?"), she kept dismissing each objection and committing them to helping. She said she had kept the Amnesty leaflets from 1989 and had made up her mind then that she wanted to help us. This is what I really like about Amnesty: chance encounters with people who are thinking the same way, and who can really make a difference.

So it looks like we may be able to sell our publications at the exhibition, collect signatures and possibly get some coverage in the women's press. By the end of the day I had got through to the computer people, to the Foreign Ministry and to *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, so it wasn't such a bad day after all.

IRA bombs went off today at Victoria and Paddington. One person killed.

Tuesday 19 February

An engineer came and mended the TV for 50 roubles (£5). Nikolay popped by and stayed for four hours, partly to help with the truculent engineer. His English is extremely good and he is a nice person. We had an extremely *Russian* tea-drinking session at 11.00am, discussing the relationship of the Turin Shroud to belief and if we see Christ as a literary hero etc.

In the afternoon I mailed two lengthy letters and enclosures to Kazakhstan and Leningrad. Farewell dinner with Margaret, who goes back to the UK on Thursday. Disposed of the pig, but came back with sausage and a tin of ham.

Wednesday 20 February

So, the Foreign Ministry will not decide finally on my status until

mid-March, i.e. this whole visit is a probationary period. It helps to know more clearly where I stand. A journalist rang to arrange an interview on doctors and human rights, and was cut off three times. She then asked me if it would be OK to do the interview in my flat, what with the phone being so funny. The phone does indeed seem ostentatiously bugged. I wonder if the flat is too.

A conscientious objector asked me to meet him and we spent an hour on a bench in the snow. Afterwards, I popped to Viktor's to pick up some papers, but got embroiled in another long evening round the teapot, listening to people I'd never met before having flaming rows. I'll have to adapt to a Russian sort of schedule, because I was dragging myself round all day, totally exhausted and wanting an early night, but in fact I was doing work of some sort from about 10.00am to 12.00pm.

Anyway, it was very fruitful at Viktor's. He has positive suggestions for our premises and drafted letters for me to use with a range of officials. He got "Memorial"[1] a building and so is a great help to have on our side. He sits in the back room typing messages, because he says he can't bear the fuss and noise in the front room. It occurred to me tonight that his mother is courting me with food, and always pushing us together. Viktor himself has a natural and lovely charm.

Thursday 21 February

Cherry pickers were out knocking long icicles off gutters, and squads were hacking impacted ice on the roads and pavements. It's very efficient. I popped out early to take materials to the *Stolitsa* office and stayed an hour, chewing the fat. Apparently a film of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* is in the making and a British crew is out shooting scenes of frozen London in Moscow. The rest of the day I worked at home with great pleasure, part of the time copying out Viktor's draft letters in my best handwriting. It reminded me of school, and I made the same kinds of mistakes.

In the evening I made myself a vocabulary book. A backlog of letters arrived today, including a cobalt blue tile design from Turkey. The colour was beautiful, brilliant and warm. I opened it in the snow at the bus stop, and thought of heat and sun-baked roofs.

Friday 22 February

Hardly anyone slept last night, it seems. Bridget Kendall was on the BBC at 8.00am, commenting on the Iraqi reaction to Soviet peace proposals, which happened early in the morning. John Lloyd of the *Financial Times* then rang, too knackered to come round because he'd worked till 4.00am. I popped into town to collect Tanya's translation of the Morocco piece. She staggered in half an hour later, having watched the RSFSR Parliament on TV till 3.00am. Conservative

deputies have called for an extraordinary congress to recall Boris Yeltsin before the 17 March referendum on "national unity" takes place. They object to his TV speech on Wednesday, when he called on Gorbachev to resign. They've chosen their moment well. I think things could be over quite quickly here.

When I got home they'd stuck a red flag on the side of the house, preparing for tomorrow's "Soldiers' and Sailors' Day". It was so sunny today I went out without a hat. The streets are being cleaned and workmen are pushing snow off the roofs.

In the evening I went to the House of Literary Buffs to hear presentations on Vyacheslav Ivanov, with Viktor and a friend of his from Moscow City Soviet, Lena.

Lena left the Communist Youth Organisation in 1987, is clever and seems totally enthusiastic about what she is doing. She belongs to a small group of Utopian socialists, and she and her pals have had non-violent action training from Dutch Greens and keep order at mass demonstrations. (I saw them march on 30 October last year and they were good.) She reminded me of one of those politicised young people in early twentieth-century Russian novels, or the young Golda Meir. She and Viktor took me right home to the flat.

Vladimir Posner has an interesting talk show with young people. When he asked for a show of hands, *all* of them said they thought the Soviet media deliberately distorts nationality issues, and they each told him why, with concrete examples. Impressive.

Saturday 23 February

The landlord's brother-in-law rang: the landlord has plans for my old TV tube and had told him to come round for it today. Ye gods! I said that would be difficult as I was going out. Stayed in and carried on with Burlatsky's memoirs, interesting in many respects, but partly because they explain the names of many Moscow streets: Marshal Biryusov, solemnly catching carp on an official visit to Prague, killed in a plane crash months later; the twenty-six Baku Commissars – apparently Mikoyan was the twenty-seventh, who got away.

In the evening I saw *Tosca* at the Bolshoy. The set was good – like a Rococo cathedral – but the singing wasn't up to much. Nina, the Russian with us, said people are paid to shout "Bravo!" from the audience, and at tonight's performance I could believe it. Interesting insight from her as we went for our coats: "We can jump the queue, because we've got binoculars" – and indeed we could.

I watched the TV show for Soldiers' and Sailors' Day. At home it would be a military tattoo followed by *Reach for the Sky* and *Dad's Army*. Here it was hours of singing and dancing: a tipsy fellow in a greatcoat dancing as an archetypal sort of rascal; and a woman in army jacket, skirts and heavy boots, nevertheless spinning and

dancing in folk patterns. It made the army seem like an ancient part of the whole culture, not a thing apart.

The pro-Yeltsin group in Parliament has apparently won out: they have postponed the extraordinary congress until 28 March, after the referendum. It's hard to believe, but a land war has started in the Gulf.

Sunday 24 February

A most enjoyable day. Friends returned from the UK, bringing me plugs and soap. Then I walked along the boulevards from west to east, about five miles in all, through old Moscow.

Thence to Quake. Afterwards we were talking and I told them about the man who threatened me. Tatyana said a man had jumped out at her on a walk and tried to rape her. She had started talking to him furiously, and the odd thing was that throughout the whole scene she called him "ty" and he addressed her by the respectful "vy". She eventually pushed him into a public place and the worst was over. He was shaken and said he'd like to smoke, and she said she would rather too, so they sat and talked. He was distraught to find she was the author of the book his mother had given him the day before. He insisted on walking her to the metro "so she'd be safe". Weird.

There were new Quakes there tonight. I can quite understand how some people find Quakers make them sick. *So* well spoken. So bloody slow to chide. So bloody quick to bless.

The *Daily Mail* has finally caught up with *Izvestiya* and says Margaret Thatcher will stand down at the next election. As I read *Izvestiya* this morning I listened to my Spanish guitar music. It suddenly made me think of Mexico, and walking along the beach to the hotel; blue sea and black shapes of sharks in the pool. I sat thinking about it, staring at my Soviet wallpaper, with the snow gleaming in through the window.

Monday 25 February

I think the landlord sensed he'd overstepped the mark with the TV and was out to appease. He brought the translations then talked for another hour about money. It is very boring. So I joined in and said the TV now has a two-year guarantee – would he like to pay half the repairs? It took some persuading, but he said yes. It's funny, he tried to win me over by talking about music. He said he'd heard a record of an Austrian tenor, then immediately told me how much the hi-fi cost.

Had a satisfying day revising translations on Morocco, the death penalty and drugs, and the March newsletter, all very good, and catching up on the newspapers.

A concert at the House of Composers in the evening – very good pianist, Mikhail Khoklov, who was a totally natural performer in completely unpretentious surroundings. In the ten minutes before the

music started I found out where to get my hair cut; heard that the Moscow Amnesty group's request for registration has come before Moscow City Soviet and will be approved fast; heard gossip from the Clemency Commission – Andrey Zapevalov's pardon is in the bag; and heard that our application for office premises is going forward. It made me feel more rooted here than I thought.

Viktor's mother was at her best after the concert: radiant, benevolent and urging us all to come again. Andrew thought she was the administrator of the House of Composers.

Tuesday 26 February

Many a plopping of drops and whooshings of water today as the thaw takes over. It is +5 degrees today, and the benches and trees are standing up to their ankles in pools of brown water.

Professor Kelina phoned today from the Institute of State and Law, very nice and friendly, and telling me who to contact in the USSR Justice Ministry for death penalty statistics. I then called the Deputy Minister of Justice and he seemed mighty relieved that I was just calling about statistics. I also called Galina Starovoytova, pleasant and anxious to help as always, from providing plates to finding premises. We got cut off three times and she said she would ask Mr Kryuchkov, head of the KGB, to supply me with a better bugging device. Viktor called and has got me an appointment about premises with Krasnopresnensky District Soviet on Monday.

The landlord's mother-in-law rang today, offering to get me theatre tickets. I wonder what fine psychological calculations are being made in that household?

The evening news said Iraq is withdrawing from Kuwait.

Wednesday 27 February

Apparently the Soviets have told the World Psychiatric Association Review Committee that they "cannot afford to host them here" – so the visit is off. Wow.

I wasted a whole day waiting for the courier, which did not come. Near five o'clock I called DH; apparently the man had just buggered off home with my parcel. I was anxious for a change of scene, so went to say goodbye to a friend, who goes back to the UK on Friday. Having worked among Brits in Moscow for three months and lived without TV, radio or newspapers, she was for some reason adamant that things are hopelessly doomed here; that it is useless to speculate otherwise; and that comparisons with Eastern Europe are not just inappropriate, but extremely irritating. Earlier I had told some journalist friends that the head of Deutsche Bank – which is a major creditor and investor here – rates Prime Minister Pavlov quite highly and thinks "perestroyka's" on course. Their immediate reaction was: "What could someone like that know?" Pretty darn much, if he's laying out his

money, I'd have thought. What is this with everyone? Basically none of us *know* what is happening, but why always write it off?

Thence I went for a late dinner with Hella and Siffra. It seemed each room, each cupboard of their flat, contained a computer winking, a fax bleeping, or a telex spewing out agency reports. They find it quite oppressive and sit there writing about the scene, scarcely leaving the flat.

Viktor has got Sergey Kovalyov, the head of the Russian Parliament's Human Rights Committee, to support my request for premises. Good guy. A letter arrived from home with 2" of envelope missing.

Thursday 28 February

There is a ceasefire in the Gulf! Lunch at Pizza Hut with Irving Rappoport, independent filmmaker who is contemplating doing a documentary about Amnesty. I liked him very much and I liked his conception of the film. No glitz.

Then I went to meet Peter and Roswitha, here to mediate in the Checheno-Ingush region and to start setting up a Quaker office. We had Gorky Park to ourselves. The wind was blowing a fine snow along the ground. There was ice underfoot, and jolly music was blaring loud and soft through the wind from loudspeakers in the trees. We went up to some massive ethnic sculptures in the middle of the park and found they were made of ice!

From there I went straight to Viktor's to pick up the letters. Zapevalov's defence lawyer phoned to say the Russian Procurator had just turned her appeal down flat, with no reasons given. She was almost speechless. Viktor's friend Kostya was there, clever, measuring his words and peering over his glasses. But I found him very depressing and beat a hasty departure. Maybe I should be starting the work from Bobrov, not Moscow, with individual priests, not journalists, and running a commercial (rouble) enterprise at the same time – but I can't do it and it's simply disheartening to have every limitation of my work here pointed out. Viktor's mother gave me a new hat, because she said the old one made me look as though I'm wanted by the police.

This morning I called Yury Reshetov, head of the Human Rights Division of the USSR Foreign Ministry, asking to meet and to keep him abreast of events. His competent and friendly secretary immediately took all this on board and will ring back with a time.

Friday 1 March

Competent, friendly secretary said Reshetov will be away all of March. I wonder if that's all true, and if it's not, what it all means. Rang the nice Mr Zhukov to confirm our meeting at Krasnopresnensky District Soviet on Monday. He ended with "So long!"

It was fresh and bright and I sat in the sun reading my paper till Nikolay came for *Gone with the Wind*. It was all read out in a monotone by one voice in Russian and the English was audible behind, so it was a real mishmash. After three hours forty minutes of all that I was terribly tired.

The landlord and his brother-in-law came round to collect a carpet and the TV tube. Both were exhilarated that the Gulf War is over and that they heard lots of foreigners on the metro. They felt this is a sign of life. Brother-in-law really did improve the TV reception. I was thinking all the time what pound of flesh the landlord will try to extract.

Saturday 2 March

I consulted my dictionary, then set off for the hairdressers. It was upstairs, through beautifully carved Art Nouveau wooden doors – apparently once the house of a poor merchant on Kropotkin Street. There were elaborate cornices, long gilt mirrors and a chandelier.

My hair was cut by Lyuda, a woman of few words with a beehive and a tracksuit. When I said I had a strong natural parting I didn't like, she said, "Maybe you should learn to like it." Last night the landlord's brother-in-law fixed the TV using a textbook for "people who don't have the right spare parts", and she cut my hair in rather the same way. It seemed very Russian – inventive and actually very good. I couldn't describe what I wanted and she flicked through a magazine till she found something halfway there, then cut my hair in about three minutes flat. I was watching her face in the mirror when she surveyed the results and she was proud. It was an enjoyable experience. £1.90.

Last night I woke up and a full yellow moon was hanging right in the middle of the window, making the sky quite green. I woke again in the first light and there was a rosy glow on the buildings. It was a spectacular day: clear, bright and sunny. I was down in the dumps one way or another, but the beauty of old Moscow made me shake out of it. On my way home I looked at the Rembrandts in the Pushkin Museum.

Did my usual trip to the PO box and found a letter, my first. "Someone's written to you!" cried the nice woman in charge of the sorting office, with just a bit too much surprise in her voice. It was from the abolitionist on the Belorussian Clemency Commission – obviously not quite sure of me, but nevertheless willing to work with Amnesty on the death penalty. He described the uphill struggle he faces, since he is normally in a minority of one, then added, "However, I think one should not lose heart." That drew me to him.

Sunday 3 March

Another wonderful day. The air was hot about your head but cool

in your lungs, and altogether invigorating. The meeting for worship was excellent. Diana and John Lampen were there, over from Ulster to mediate in the Checheno-Ingush and to do peace education with children in Minsk. Those of us based in Moscow were all feeling the strain a bit and more mellow than last week. Roswitha told me how Rembrandt uses light. In his *Prodigal Son* the light falls on the father's forehead and she thinks this points to his dawning understanding of what it is all about.

Afterwards Tatyana, Margaret and I walked to Teply Stan summit in the snow, through the birch trees and under a blue sky. In a clearing we came across an elderly woman in hat, coat and ankle boots, who had hung up her handbag and was doing press-ups against a climbing frame.

This weekend prices rose 5% – the "President's tax". I dreamt I was trying to hang up a map of the world. I'd managed to pin up the top left-hand corner, but two people helping me kept getting it twisted, or missing the nail. I was seething inside.

Monday 4 March

In the morning I visited *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. As I was sitting in the waiting room the door to the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* office swung open, as if on cue, to reveal the administrator receiving a bottle in tissue paper and putting it in his drawer. Svetlana Orlyuk was interested in all our material and also in doing an article about our office. Oddly enough, on her desk she had a copy of Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son*. I explained about the forehead and the light, but it didn't do much for her. She gave me *Komsomolskaya Pravda*'s latest on the death penalty. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* is on a street with a number of establishment newspapers, including the CPSU paper, *Pravda*. I popped into their local Gastronom and was impressed by the mounds of sausage, the *smetana*, eggs and packets of dried milk on sale. They don't have them in our area.

In the afternoon I went to Krasnopresnensky District Soviet to see the lean, charming and rangy Mr Zhukov about possible premises. He said they had promised us an office in November and had set space aside. His deputy came in, rifled through a list of Executive Committee resolutions from 19 November 1990 and came up with our address: 20 Malaya Bronnaya. I asked about rent and Zhukov said, "We know who to soak. We don't want anything from you." I was knocked back by their efficiency as much as their goodwill. They said it was local self-government taking over. We should "put our faith in the municipalities, and not in Gorbachev".

On winged feet I went to see *Taxi Blues* and a documentary film on Chernobyl, both made for export, and subtitled by John Crowfoot. The saxophonist from Zvuki Moo was in *Taxi Blues*; his face is

alternately saintly, and totally deadbeat. Great music, good film.

The computer team rang from London and I got an idea of how hard people are working on my behalf. They can't yet find me a printer which will produce Cyrillic. One of the consultants they asked about it had said, "Cyril who?"

Both Latvia and Estonia voted for independence yesterday in their local referenda. I'm sure all these signals – the demonstrations last weekend, the end of the Gulf War, the referenda – are mutually reinforcing. Another wedge is knocked in, I think. My admiration for Muscovites grows. It is very undermining living in this uncertainty, but they are patient and astonishingly good humoured about it – then when they get a chance, they go for change.

Tuesday 5 March

I had a vivid dream which made me wake up with a sense of tragedy.

In the morning I went to the Russian Supreme Soviet to meet people at the Inter-Fax agency. If Gorbachev has changed in the last two years, Pyotr Vasiliev has changed in the opposite direction. He looks lighter and freer. They immediately agreed to take our news releases on the aftermath of the Gulf War and on the women's publication. They have 170 subscribers in the USSR, so not bad. They are a small group of about seven people with a few computers, but very busy and apparently motivated.

From there I walked along the Krasnopresnensky Embankment up to the Military Commissariat of Krasnopresnensky District to register our office premises. In the wrong door, into total dilapidation, smelling of semen. Someone had scribbled "No to War" in English on a window. An old woman told me to go to the next entrance. This led to a clean, bare room with a lot of plants in the window. There was an old lady there, a man and me, and I spent an hour there in what seemed like slow motion. I thought the old lady was weeping with her head on the desk when I came in, but she was just extremely short-sighted and poring over the form she was filling in. She then must have asked the woman at the desk at least twelve times if she should leave the form there or bring it back next day. I was beginning to imagine what it will be like running our own office here, and was also looking round the room, admiring it. As we've been offered 30 square metres, I leaned over and asked the man how big he thought this room was. He suddenly whipped out a tape measure and began to measure all its dimensions, over and behind my head etc. It was 40 square metres. Only after all this did two very polite official women tell me the office was only open to the public on Mondays and Thursdays. So in fact we'd spent over an hour in an office that was shut.

I came home via our office space at Malaya Bronnaya No. 20. It is next to a shoe repair shop in a pedestrian area in old Moscow. Things are being rebuilt and it reminds me of Covent Garden before it was tarted up. The actual office is a small, dark shop with a picture window – but that may be good for an information bureau. It needs work.

The afternoon was a cycle of fruitless phone calls. What a joke Sokolenko is at the Foreign Ministry. I told him I am actually going home in two weeks' time, so he said he would "put a full stop to the question of my accreditation" on Monday. I wonder if he has done anything at all these last two months.

I beetled off to another Mikhail Khoklov concert, but I couldn't find it. I wandered round the Music School attached to the Conservatory and was drawn to piano music thundering out from the fourth floor. I found two adults listening to a seven-year-old oriental child playing without music.

The London office sent me a wonderful tape of Stan Getz playing *Jazz Samba*. Definitely music to seduce, and be seduced by.

Wednesday 6 March

I had an enjoyable day working quite hard on a mailing to press in Moscow, Ukraine, Leningrad, Uzbekistan. Dr Savenko popped by and I realised how much more fluent my Russian has become since last time. A surprise box of food arrived from London – wonderful! Heather is in town, arranging meetings with all Amnesty's new members, and we had dinner at the Ordynka – very indifferent – then tort and tea at my kitchen table. It felt nice to have another Amnesty person here in the land of the Soviets – both of us grappling with the enormity of our jobs.

Thursday 7 March

Off early to the USSR Ministry of Justice to collect their new statistics on the death penalty. It is a concrete bunker among the nice old houses of Obukha Street. I was taken up to a large reception room by a young man from the Foreign Relations Department, then met by Zoya Grigorievna Yakovleva, an ex-judge, who now heads their Statistics Department. She was *animus* writ large, but without Professor Kelina's *joie de vivre* and warmth.

We had a very interesting meeting. She came armed with files and was relieved to know I'm not a lawyer. As she relaxed she warmed to her theme: how she personally knew the death penalty was a deterrent and that it is still needed because of the huge rise in serious crimes. After a while I ventured rather mildly: if the death penalty is a deterrent, to what does she attribute the rise in serious crimes? I felt a perceptible reaction from the young man from the Foreign Relations Department, and so for his benefit thought it was

probably worth continuing the discussion.

Zoya Yakovleva, like other Soviets I've spoken to, thinks that the death penalty deters; that crime has risen because society has gone soft; and that anyway life imprisonment is harsher than the death penalty (?). I pointed out the contradiction in this but she didn't see it. The editor of the *Journal of Humanitarian Sciences* told me that Russians have a taste for blood and I could see it in her. She said it was better to make a few mistakes than to leave people "unpunished". Our whole conversation took place under Lenin's head. Non-Party justice has not yet arrived.

The young man, who was called Yevgeny, showed me out and said, "I *do* believe that prisoners can have a life. They can read and do sports. I do not agree with Zoya Grigorievna." He took me out into the street and kissed my hand.

From there I trekked back to the 40-sq-metre room at Krasnopresnensky War Commissariat to register our premises. This time a woman was speaking, with tears in her voice, about how four of them lived in a room 14 square metres small, and it was suffocating her. It was sad to listen to, but I must say the woman behind the desk was kind and polite. The woman who took my form thinks 20 Malaya Bronnaya may already have been given to a glass-recycling shop.

In the evening I had dinner at Pizza Hut with Karmit, a friend from Amnesty in the USA, and we were joined by Heather and Viktor from the Prague Amnesty group. Viktor compared the political situation to the physical reactions in a hot cup of coffee. He's a molecular biologist.

Friday 8 March

Tonight we passed two respectable middle-aged women, drunk and singing loudly in the street. It's International Women's Day. I took flowers to Yelena's mother in the morning and asked out of interest if she was observing the Lenten fast. I think she thought I was being sarcastic, because she said, "No, I'll just put the kettle on in a minute."

Enjoyed myself in the afternoon putting together forty sets of Amnesty material for Karmit to take with her to Moldavia, Minsk, Sumgait, the Ukraine and elsewhere. Then, when I'd had enough, I sat and darned my tights, listening to the radio.

Saturday 9 March

I went back to vitamin pills today because my mouth is sore. It's been five days since I found a pint of milk, and I am sick of sleeping on a couch.

Had a long lie in, then prepared fifty sets of material for Ulla and Heather to take through the Ukraine with them. Also translated Professor Kelina's speech on the death penalty at the Eighth UN Congress on Crime and the Treatment of Offenders. Took tapes, books

and fruit to a UK friend who is recovering from a temperature of 105 degrees and bronchitis. On the tube it struck me that there was a lot of romance in the air – possibly because of the Women's Day holiday yesterday. Perhaps all those flowers and shopping have a big pay-off. I watched one couple and you could see from her face that she was terribly in love with him. She looked as though she would do anything to protect him from the breezes that blow and, at the same time, as though she wanted to burst into tears with emotion.

I came home and watched *Monsters of Soviet Rock* on TV. Quite good music and interesting videos, but funny adverts kept beaming along the bottom, like: "The Red Banner shoe shop requires an electrician and a cloakroom attendant". It was like glamorous films in St Andrews, which always carried an advert for the North Fife Co-op Society.

In the evening I went to the Amnesty meeting – a truly international gathering with visitors from Amnesty in Czechoslovakia, Ireland, USA, Sweden and the UK. Ulla Birgegaard gave a presentation on the Swedish Section in Russian and it was just right: her story of group member to Chair of the Board and back to group member. She has a lovely manner. Everyone oohed and aahed at the offer of 20 Malaya Bronnaya, and said it would be a miracle if we got it. At least that's a sign it's a desirable address and maybe it will be a miracle, who knows? I was glad to pool ideas with them about the Women's Campaign and Amnesty's thirtieth anniversary. Karmit came up with good ideas for Leningrad TV and video sessions with Moscow students.

Tomorrow is the big pre-referendum demonstration in favour of Yeltsin and "the democratic forces". Yeltsin was booming out of Tatyana's radio when I went to visit Chris on his sick bed. It actually reminded me of people crowding round the crystal set to listen to Hitler. Tatyana's son had gone busking in the metro yesterday and got more money than she gets from the Academy of Sciences.

Sunday 10 March

I found a cockroach had suffocated in my muesli bag this morning.

The street was busy when I set out for the demonstration at 11.30am and it turned out most people were hurrying in the same direction. I felt mounting excitement as the crowd thickened at the Lenin Library Station and poured out onto the street. We were met by a row of police. Two old ladies giggled and said, "Are they not going to let us through?" But they did, and in fact, where I saw it, the policing was perfect. Low key, good-humoured and apparently well planned. No riot gear, no horses, no helicopters, just lorries parked in backstreets and some cars with their engines turning over on the

Manezh Square.

When I arrived a huge crowd was pouring into the Manezh down Kalinin Prospekt, from the north, and another smaller one was filing in from Oktyabrskaya in the south. When they caught sight of each other their roars soared. “Down with the CPSU” was being chanted all the way down Kalinin Prospekt – amazing when you think about it. The two columns met and filled the Manezh. That apparently takes about 200,000 people. People were on the roof of the Moscow Students’ Theatre, hanging on railings and standing stock-still in the park listening to the loudspeakers. Afanasyev, Popov, Gdlyan and Stankevich all spoke, advising people to spoil their ballot papers in the referendum on the USSR and to vote for a republican presidency in the Russian referendum. Some Kuzbass miners also called for a general strike. With the current press restrictions it seemed everyone had turned out basically to find out what they should do. We were standing under the walls of the Kremlin and almost every time Gorbachev was mentioned the crowd shouted, “Gorbachev – out!” I noticed how well Popov and Stankevich were received by the crowd and how well both of them spoke.

Boris Yeltsin has another of his tactical illnesses, but there was a sinister moment when extracts of the speech he gave yesterday were relayed over the speakers. This disembodied, guttural voice shouting into the air reinforced the dislike I felt when I heard him on the radio yesterday. The crowd listened, rapt, and flags fluttered in front of the monolithic buildings.

I saw a nice scene in the park. One speaker talked of the CPSU’s war against the people, and a genteel old lady in furs began to clap as she walked along. She was overtaken at that moment by a punk on roller skates, who was also clapping. According to Radio Rossiya, similar large demonstrations took place in several Russian cities today. At ours people were admiring each other’s posters and enjoying their wit. At one point during the speeches the compère announced that a six-year-old girl was looking for her parents – a nice touch, more like a village fete than a mass meeting of nearly a third of a million people. It was big, but judging from their reaction, the authorities don’t think it was big enough to be a threat.

Ten of us were at the Quakers tonight. I was struck by the purity and saintliness of Sasha Lukin’s face and on the way home told him so. He was going to say thank you, but remembered that at times like these Buddhists say, “You’re welcome.” Nice.

I lit my first cigarette for six years today but put it out. I’m definitely needing more stimulus/stimulants than I’m getting.

Monday 11 March

I reached some sort of a personal crisis today. I have got to get

away from what I am doing and find some more fun. At the same time I was ready to murder someone in the morning. The computer man, having put me off from Thursday, is now ill. Sergey Gitman from the Moscow group put me off until tomorrow. And of course the man from the USSR Foreign Ministry, who was to give me a final answer today, was completely inaccessible by phone.

I put together materials and a letter and trekked up to Krasnopresnensky again. Olga Lavrova was out of the office and the other official, Tikhanovsky, was not receiving people. I sat for a while in quite a crowded waiting room while a mad woman walked backwards and forwards in front of us all, telling a story and gesticulating wildly. Eventually I left the things for Olga Lavrova and went to John just for company and conversation. John very nicely gave me lunch and invited me to their *dacha* at the weekend, possibly sensing that I have reached my limit.

I then went to the Foreign Ministry Press Centre and, together with an irate Irish journalist, stormed Sokolenko as he was entering the building at 3.00pm. He said he would extend my visa and give me a letter for the local police passport office. But he did not like this, and there were no smiles or "ty". But what can I do when I am always being given the run around?

I had called Sergey Gitman and said I would drop off the photos for the Amnesty exhibition today anyway, and did. His street is fascinating. The house looks right out over a seventeenth-century church, very dilapidated, which until recently was a communal flat. In the distance above the rooftops are a sign for Coca Cola on the right and McDonald's on the left. I enjoyed the quiet talk with Sergey, and looking at his books of photos. There was a wonderful sequence by someone called Vladimir Kuprianov, I think, showing the faces of factory women above subtitles from Pushkin, like: "Pound beneath me, silent ocean" and "I hurried with anguish and desire in my heart". The faces were inappropriate at one level, but very appropriate at another.

Sokolenko got his revenge and did not leave the papers he had promised.

As soon as I got in two ex-prisoners, Ruslan and Vitaly, came round, partly to chat and drink tea. I think Yelena's mother had sent them because I'm not having very many visitors and they brought me a sieve from her. As they were leaving Nikolay arrived and I was glad to see him for a long leisurely chat. There was the usual distrust of Russians meeting each other for the first time.

Tuesday 12 March

I slept late and had a lazy and restful day. In the morning I called Vladimir Chernyega, the Pro-Rector of the USSR Academy of

Diplomacy. He's a member of Shevardnadze's new Foreign Policy Association and I thought we might exchange materials. His secretary answered in a small shocked voice, "He was sacked last night." Yipes.

I took my mail down to the Warsaw Highway and shopped on the way home. The mail has now gone up from 100 roubles to 115 roubles. I got cheese in the market! My first since I've been here, but it cost £2.50 for 1lb. Butter was the same and I didn't buy it. There were wedding dresses on sale at the market. I saw in *Kommersant* that inflation in Moscow last month was 14%.

Wednesday 13 March

I realise my landlord gets a kind of erotic charge from talking about money. He's never seen it in enormous quantity, but it excites him thinking what he'd like to do with it. He asked me how you open an account in a Western bank, but obviously couldn't bear to be told by a woman, so kept interrupting and saying "nonsense".

I mailed more materials to journalists in Belorussia, Latvia and Lithuania, then went out for a breath of air. The local bookshop had a handwritten list of books for dog lovers, with the following titles: *Canine Infections*; *Rabies*; *I Am So Beautiful*; *Time for Love*; *Tuberculosis*; and *Distemper*.

It is very hard to read what is going on here. Today I rang the Human Rights Division of the Foreign Ministry and was immediately put directly in touch with Deputy Head, Smirnov, who was all charm and wants to meet tomorrow. Last week I was left hanging. I also called the computer firm and was put through to a different man, who was actually *helpful* and gave me an idea of the next steps. I rang Vladimir Chernyega too, and our phones must have been double-bugged because we were virtually inaudible to each other. He sounded interested that Amnesty had called.

Thursday 14 March

A horse seemed to play a leading role in my dream. It was sensitive and powerful and was wearing make-up on its face. It seemed more vivid than the people around it.

The World Service is running a series called *As We Forgive*, which describes each week how someone has come to terms with an experience that devastated them. It is almost too raw to listen to. This morning it was the woman who had been raped and buggered in her father's vicarage in Ealing. She said it was actually harder to forgive the judge than the rapists. I wonder if he knows that? Or if he has any idea of the effect his remarks had? I hope so.

It was hard to drag myself out of bed this morning. I finished typing up my translation of Professor Kelina's speech, then went to the Foreign Ministry, Human Rights Division. Nikolay Smirnov, Deputy Head, saw me and was obviously anxious to be pleasant. We had tea

and biscuits and I updated him on the office. He said quite plainly that in the UK the police and Home Office probably don't like what we do, and it's the same in Moscow. The Russian-language Amnesty material I had given him would help to "convert" them. He said too, as a "personal" opinion, that some government organisations didn't like the way we came here under the Press Department of the Foreign Ministry, as though we were trying to worm in through the back door. I explained how that had happened through no engineering of our own.

We then talked about the human rights conference that is due to take place in Moscow in September and also about materials Amnesty could provide on refugees etc. He said I will probably end up having contacts with the Foreign Policy Committee of the USSR Supreme Soviet, but for the time being they are "inevitably suspicious". At least I don't think I have been imagining a diplomatic cold shoulder these past weeks.

Viktor Zarsky and I didn't meet up, so ended up seeing *The Seagull* separately at the Moscow Arts Theatre. It's a beautiful theatre and the show was good, but I found myself thinking, "When we're all dead and gone they'll still be worrying this to death." It's almost like family charades, going on and on. The feeling got stronger after the interval as I watched the theatre lights dim, then snuff out.

There's heavy advertising for a "yes" vote in Sunday's referendum on the state of the union. I got two leaflets in my letterbox saying, "Vote yes – for life!" There were *five* adverts in the bus shelter: one in full colour, showing the historic city and saying "The collapse of the Union is Moscow's sunset"; another mawkish one, with a little girl in tears, saying "Mama, save my future – go and vote yes for the Union!"

I found it interesting watching people's reactions as they passed. They definitely noticed but did not break their step. Derision passed across several faces, although I couldn't pinpoint how, because scarcely a muscle moved. It is a characteristic Russian reaction. Meanwhile Yeltsin has been refused TV time before the referendum. I think the campaign could backfire on Gorbachev.

Friday 15 March

The five posters had been ripped down today and replaced by three small handbills: one calling for a demonstration against the referendum at Tula metro tomorrow and another in favour of the Union, but not on Gorbachev's terms. Someone had scrawled on it, "May God save Yeltsin, dear Muscovites", and someone else had added, "He's worse than Gorbachev". People *were* stopping to study these – but does it mean anything?

I took the translation for Professor Kelina to see. She was looking very nice, fresh and slim, and we had a pleasant short chat. She made

a great point of putting me in her address book under "M" for Marjorie, because "that is how she thinks of me".

When I collected my chitty from the Foreign Ministry Press Centre I found Sokolenko has *not* extended my visa, but simply allowed me to register retrospectively for the time I've been here. So they may want me to leave next Saturday and go through the whole stupid rigmarole of reapplying from London.

I went to the Visa Department to register. I was third in the queue for over an hour while close on twenty people jumped the line. At one point a fight broke out among Brits and Russians behind us, shortly before a French woman in front of me began absolutely howling. When I got into the office it turned out I was in the wrong line and had to queue again at a different window. While I was there an old lady came in and began hitting the policeman on duty, who bundled her out. What a madhouse.

In the evening I had a thoroughly enjoyable evening at Kate Moore and Todd Weinberg's. Two doctoral students were there and the rest of us were all trying to "set things up" in Moscow. I liked them all. Everyone could be having an easier and wealthier life at home but they are fascinated by the Soviet Union and prompted by some frontier spirit. Got a lift home from one of the men and his Russian girlfriend. I think he was rather in love with the Russian ethos his girlfriend brings, because he was constantly talking, more than he needed to, to show off his handle on domestic Russian. However, the spell was broken when he drove over a trench in the road and she hit her head on the roof and gave him a mouthful.

Saturday 16 March

The grey drizzly weather continues. A Party official came round canvassing in the morning and I noticed the opposition handbills have now been ripped off the bus stop.

A domestic morning. When I came out of the laundrette there was a huge queue outside the "Emergency Repairs to Artistic Boots" shop. I can't imagine why.

I went up to John and Olya's, who were going to take me out to their *dacha* in Peredelkino. Outside Barrikadnaya metro there was a terrific row going on about the referendum. A glamorous tall blonde with an extraordinarily deep voice was enjoining people to vote against the union. Two middle-aged women took her up on it and drew their own crowds. One was well dressed and articulate and kept saying she was for law and order, and hard work. The other was poorer and got herself near to tears, saying she'd lived through the war etc. Everyone was down her throat and saying, "You're feeding the Communists, that's all"; "Look at you, your clothes are old and tattered, what an advert for seventy-three years!" At that point *I* felt

like crying and wished they would shut up.

John and I flagged down a cab on Kutuzovsky Prospekt then drove out to Peredelkino, the official Writers' Colony which, surprisingly enough, is just off the main road about twenty minutes west of Moscow. You can see the suburbs encroaching. There was a woman in the cab too, and it suddenly emerged that she and the driver are married and emigrating to Israel in the autumn. Other members of their family have gone to the US. They have no strong religious affiliation and no illusions about how easy it will be, but are learning Hebrew, want to live in a small town, and are prepared to do anything to earn a living. Both are grandparents at forty and to my surprise kept saying they were still young enough to learn. Soviet women in particular tend to say they're past it at thirty. They said they were leaving not because of food shortages, but because they had no opportunities to develop their talents. I liked all that.

The *dacha* is very big, shabby but comfortable, and apparently where the writer Fadeyev shot himself. The Pasternak museum is next door. We took the four-year-old Petya for a long walk through the woods and round the lake, he clutching two spades and a bottle of shampoo. After Moscow it was wonderfully quiet, and there was snow on the ground and a great sunset. We had a beautiful dinner then watched the thriller *Sea of Love* in Russian. Whenever one of the family moved or coughed, someone else would jump and say "Stop it!" because it gave them such a fright. It's very easy to be a guest with Russians because people just act normally all round you.

Sunday 17 March

The weather was fantastic. I came home early via the polling station. Some old women were collecting signatures at the door, against a local road-widening scheme. There was a brisk turnout, I would say, of old folk, all filling out their ballot papers in full view of the tellers and not in the booths. There were posies of red flowers on each table, but I didn't see the famed buffet which everyone told me there would be.

Ludmilla rang me out of the blue from Leningrad. I told her I had been waiting to get official accreditation here before I contacted her, but there were a lot of difficulties. She said, "I thought it would be very difficult – but are you enjoying life?" I said I was enjoying everyday life, was she? "No," she said, and she'd just voted "no" in the referendum. I said she was breaking the confidentiality of the ballot box. She said she was breaking the confidentiality of two ballot boxes because her husband had done the same. We tried ringing each other back three times, but each time we were barely audible to each other and got cut off.

I was immensely stirred by her call – as though she was "coming

out" and had called me straightaway. It seems to mean a lot for our friendship. Also, if someone as loyal and cautious as her has voted "no", what is happening to this country?

A UK friend came round to borrow my vacuum cleaner and brought me a nice sultana biscuit from his polling station booth. I took Nikolay to the Quakes and, as I expected, he took to the silence straightaway. Vitaly Yerenkov was there in skin-tight leather trousers. We had a very good talk afterwards about spirituality here and abroad. This time it was Russians speaking to show off how much English they know. On the tube home I seemed to be surrounded by people saying "fit as a fiddle" and "honesty is the best policy". Exhausting.

Discovered I left my earrings at the house where Fadeyev shot himself.

Monday 18 March

I worked at home till 2.00pm. I'm beginning to go back to my student style, reading something but always thinking what I'm going to eat next. I felt mildly poisoned and squeamish all day. Decided I must exercise every day, and walked down to the Tretyakov Gallery, but found it was closed on Mondays. The militiaman on the door said, "Do you really want to go in?" and gave me a ticket from his pocket. So I walked round the Serov exhibition, virtually alone. The new gallery extension is beautiful by any standards and the paintings were luminous and wonderful.

This morning, to my surprise, I found Sokolenko at his desk at the Foreign Ministry at 9.00am. He said his bosses had vetoed a re-entry visa for me and I will have to reapply from London. Poor guy, always having to break the bad news. He was "ty"-ing me again for all his worth. I also called Mr Zhukov to ask what is the next step on the premises. He said Krasnopresnensky Soviet had worked all day Sunday as a protest against the referendum and that I should get my answer on Wednesday.

The landlord came round and very demonstratively counted out 144 roubles to pay half the TV repairs. I have since donated it to Amnesty on his behalf. He then began totting up how much money I had spent on the things I brought him as rent, with many a flourish on his pocket calculator. However, I noticed the flourishes got smaller as it turned out I had overpaid by £100, i.e. at least another month's rent. He had obviously thought I was owing him something.

Tuesday 19 March

Professor Kelina said she would leave updates on her death penalty speech for me in her office. Three years ago, I wonder if she ever thought she would be giving someone from Amnesty free run of her office? When I dropped by I bumped into Svetlana Polubinskaya,

just back from the USSR Supreme Soviet.

I worked flat out all morning revising the April newsletter and catching up with things, then spent four hours travelling the length and breadth of Moscow from post office to the Institute of State and Law and then the British Airways office to pick up my plane tickets. Pretty tiring.

In the evening I went to see *Liquid Sky* at the Udarnik, which I liked very much. It was made by Russian émigrés in New York, which amused the audience. A bisexual Annie Lennox type is used by both the men and women she sleeps with, until a being from outer space gives her the power to kill them when they have an orgasm. The orgasm releases a chemical in their brain which the film shows with the same music and visual effects as an injection of drugs – beautiful sequences. Both are deadly. Rather pitifully, the heroine is safe because she has never had an orgasm.

The film was 100% style, and about total alienation in 1980s New York. When I stepped outside the cinema, the scene could hardly have been different: a houseboat on the river, ice floes on the water, Art Nouveau railings on the bridge, old chimneys above the factory, people muffled in caps and scarves. It felt like a scene from Mayakovsky's life in the 1920s.

I'd been listening to Laurie Anderson in the morning and enjoying it, though also feeling it was light years removed from life here. It too is often about alienation; but like *Liquid Sky*, it is the alienation of people who live with a lot of things, and through their things. They are the subject of their world and they just have a lot of trouble getting another subject to come into contact with them.

Here people are often alienated, and I feel alienated, in quite a different way. It's because you are an object, and not able to control things. Nevertheless, you have no trouble coming into contact with other "objects", because you are always fighting with them in shops, or sharing meals with them. The food you buy is real, not synthetic. It is less lonely. Also there's more politics, less style.

Wednesday 20 March

What a day! Four hundred per cent price rises for meat, bread, tea and something else will be brought in on 2 April. That means meat will be 160 roubles, or over £10 a kilo. At the end of the day I learned the striking miners have dropped all their economic demands because they believe the current political system is incapable of providing them. They are pressing only for their political demands to be met, i.e. for Gorbachev and Pavlov to hand over power to the Council of the Federation. The Deputy Minister of Health of Russia has joined five miners in an open-ended hunger strike for Gorbachev's removal! There's very little official coverage of the strikes.

Had visits all morning, then was out of the house working from 2.00 to 11.30pm. Lydia Zapevalova was anxious to talk to me about her son's death sentence. I decided to take her to Kolomenskoye Park, and feared I was late, but we both got off the same train, carrying identical bunches of yellow flowers for each other. We did not find the park but by chance found ourselves at the Kolomenskoye monastery, a rather bleak but beautiful place on a high bluff overlooking a bend in the Moscow River. Above the blue cupolas and gold stars of one church there were crows circling nests in the tall trees. Their noise was everywhere. We went through an arch at the top of a slope and came onto a very elegant but stark church – all white pillars and towers, lined and roofed in black. The river lay behind it.

The Clemency Commission had decided to pardon Andrey Zapevalov, five votes to two, on 11 March. Now it is up to Gorbachev to have the final say. Lydia seems to be less hopeful than before. She has a recurring dream that Andrey phones and says, "Mama". She looks out of the window and sees him looking at her in the courtyard. She waves him to come in but he thinks she is saying "go away", and turns round and walks off. She runs after him but he is already at a crossroads in the distance and beyond her reach.

We had quite a peaceful hour. As we sat on a bench an old man came up raging about "this savage country", because someone had used planks from the other bench to make a bonfire. "They're criminals! Criminals!" he shouted, absolutely beside himself.

She took me to a café. I said no to goulash but while I was sitting enjoying a cucumber salad she whipped out a huge sausage and ham from her bag and sliced some of it onto bread for me. I really must get out of this stupid position, because I felt I had to eat a piece but was trying not to gag as I did so. Lydia is really made for happier times; she is very warm, ready to laugh and a real sensualist.

Afterwards I rushed to Sergey Gitman's to collect materials for Amnesty's Women's Campaign, which I am going to photocopy. They opened the door with much laughter and pleasant smiling: apparently they had turned the house upside down but could not find the materials, so Sergey was going to have to retype it *all*. I felt a combination of my heart sinking and my blood pressure rising and wanted to reach for a cigarette. However, I sat it out and even though I only got home at 8.00pm, it was all quite enjoyable. There is a relaxed and smiling atmosphere in their home, and although Sergey was meant to be racing against time to finish the job, he kept moving to the easychair and telling me another story. I kept thinking, "What are we doing talking about this?", but enjoying it all anyway.

From another part of the flat we could hear someone playing Debussy *Etudes* very well, then Dave Brubeck. They told me it was

their nine-year-old son, Alexander. I visualised a small genius with huge specs, but popped my head round the door and found a nice and normal boy playing, with his budgerigar – Elizabeth Beast – sitting on the keys.

As I was tired when I got home I asked Viktor if he would come to me, but he was ill and so I went over to him. Two hundred copies of Amnesty's death penalty report were stacked in his grandmother's room for Viktor to distribute to the Russian Supreme Soviet. His grandmother was totally confused by them, and told me she didn't need them and they should have gone to a shop. "They're all by the same authors and they all say the same thing," she said. She very nicely made me a cup of tea in their best china, but it was lukewarm and full of sugar. She wouldn't let me take it through to the other room, so I had to sit and drink it in front of her, trying not to gag. She went off to bed and I later asked Viktor where the pigeon was. It was apparently asleep in the grandmother's room with her and the death penalty reports. Poor woman.

In amongst all these comings and goings I managed to buy a pint of milk.

Thursday 21 March

I was at Viktor Zarsky's by 8.30am giving him mailings for Minsk. He's probably the nicest person I've met here. I then went for breakfast with a visitor from the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights in New York, at the Communist Party Central Committee's hotel. It's the anonymous modern and prosperous building on Dimitrov Street, which has electronic gates. Inside there's some nice lighting, plants, wood and marble. Apparently Richard Nixon is staying here, and Ivan Polozkov, head of the Russian Communist Party, lives here, because the Moscow Soviet won't give him house room. As I was waiting outside Mary's room, "Knock, knock, knocking on heaven's door" came wafting over the sound system.

Mary's here arranging exchanges and seminars on the independence of the judiciary. I ate steadily throughout our meeting. There's going to be a human rights conference here in September of all the governments who are part of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Mary said the Lawyers' Committee is planning to focus only on the USSR, because in their view "it's really a conference on the human rights situation here". I said Amnesty would be focusing on human rights in *all* the participating states, dropping a sour lemon into the generally pleasant conversation.

I was home by 10.30am and had a fruitful hour of phone calls to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Moscow News* and the Moscow Amnesty group. Then I went over to Krasnopresnensky to see Zhukov about the premises and up to Hella and Siffra's, to use their

photocopier for our material on the Women's Campaign.

At night I grappled with my accounts, ready for going home. Heather rang from Kiev, pretty tired but extremely excited by the beginnings of a new group in Drohobych. Good! We are beginning to take off here.

I was very thirsty in the afternoon and bought what I thought was flavoured mineral water in a green bottle, outside the metro. I asked the man if he would help me open the top. He said uncertainly, "Are you going to drink it?" I took a mouthful and found it was cooking oil. Didn't know whether to spit it out all over 1905 Street station or swallow, but eventually swallowed it. I was running to the toilet for the next four hours.

Friday 22 March

Another day which began promptly at 9.00am and ended with my last visitor at 11.30pm, and last phone call at midnight. In the morning I put together a long letter and materials for Galina Starovoytova, asking amongst other things if she would nudge Krasnopresnensky Premises Fund about our office when I am away in the UK.

As I was writing to her I got so many calls making confusing arrangements, that when Aleksandr Golding from the Sakharov Foundation arrived at the door, I just stared at him blankly. I was up a ladder changing a light bulb at the time, and although we'd never met before he took his coat off and went straight up the ladder, like a ferret up a drainpipe.

I had lunch down at Valentina's. She's now feverishly optimistic that the "democrats" will "win" by autumn, because of a Nostradamus prophecy. I don't know how we get from here to there. After a visit to the Deputy Editor of *Moscow News*, who promised to advertise our Thirtieth Anniversary Campaign, I went to meet Zaure, Viktor Zarsky's friend from Kazakhstan.

It was a very memorable three hours at the flat where she is staying on the Arbat. I can't think I ever have conversations like that outside the USSR – we started off strangers and left arm in arm. She's a molecular biologist at the Academy of Sciences and a Party member in her mid-thirties, with an exceptionally pleasant manner. She gave me some interesting insights: because Kazakhs have always been herdspeople, she reckons that land privatisation will mean big purchases for outside buyers. In Uzbekistan, where the population works the land, she reckons the locals will benefit from privatisation. She reckons blood will be spilt in the USSR by winter, but that Kazakhstan may escape the worst; simply because the President is in such a vulnerable position he is being very responsive to all sectors of the population. Zaure adores European classical music. "How about

Renaissance music?" I asked, but she said no, the Renaissance was a dark, deeply European tradition that she does not like. That puts us in our place.

We talked a lot about Amnesty, God, different styles of friendship. Through the Afghan-Vietnam veterans' work she does she's met a lot of people from the US. One had stayed with her for two weeks, then one day had cut her dead, which devastated her. She mentioned it again later. In some ways US and Soviet friendship does seem like opposite ends of a pole.

From there I hiked down to the Moscow Hotel to speak with Galina Starovoytova's assistant, Ludmilla. The TV was on in the lobby, booming through the ground floor and she said Galina was sharing the platform in Leningrad with Yeltsin. We watched together, and it seemed quite a fateful address, presumably part of his election campaign for the 28 March Congress. A lot of deputies from the hotel were glued to the set. Ludmilla Vasilievna reckons there will be violence here by summer.

Hurried home to pack for going home tomorrow. The phone suddenly went dead for three hours, just before Lydia Zapevalova arrived, bearing gifts for the Amnesty team in London. She immediately began dismantling the rags that bind the phone lead together and started knotting wires together. I must say Soviet guests are immensely practical. Last thing at night Dr Savenko rolled up.

Two odd things about the landlord: he waived the phone bill (only 2 roubles, but never mind). He then referred in passing to the many visits I've made to the USSR. He doesn't actually *know* I've made many visits here. As far as he is aware this is only my second. I wonder if he has been making enquiries, or if he always knew.

I saw a vivid scene today. Officials in leather coats were stacking boxes of Panasonic equipment into the back of an official car, running backwards and forwards from an official building. A few yards down the street a man with a banner was collecting food and money for the striking miners, and a poor couple were giving him money. Perhaps the Panasonic equipment was for orphans, but I kind of doubt it. I just felt, *God, the Party has got it coming to it*.

I am continually struck by the beautiful faces I see on the escalators and in the metro. Russians seem immensely physical somehow and today I tried to think how. They're not healthy, like some Californian fitness people, but they seem to express themselves and to be fully present in their bodies. With the Californian "type", you're not particularly aware of anything expressing itself. Physical, spontaneous, subtle, brutal, collective, dark – I suddenly thought, *We're talking "anima" here*. Equally suddenly it seemed clear that for all its similarities, the US is the land of the *animus*. And Britain

somehow doesn't figure in this scheme of things!

I rang the head of the USSR Clemency Commission to express our London office's interest in the outcome of Andrey Zapevalov's case. It is due to come before Gorbachev in the next ten days. Cheremnykh is a big fan of our Secretary General, it turns out. He said, "We will do everything we can to save that young man's life." He will present the case to Gorbachev.

Saturday 23 March

Terribly excited about going home today. In the time I'd set aside for packing I was visited by Nikolay, Sergey, Jon, Phil, John and Chris. It was too much and I made a total mess of packing, leaving my camera on the floor and all my things in the bathroom.

Nikolay came to the airport with me and kept me company for an hour. It was good of him, but he was really having a field day. He started by saying that he didn't like Arabs in a group, then later said how hard he'd found it working with Jamaicans at a conference last year, but they were "niggers". As though to make this more palatable for me, he said, "We say in Russia that there are Jews and there are Yids – well, there are blacks and there are niggers!" I said that perhaps he didn't understand the offensiveness of what he was saying in English.

I looked at his good, nice face trying to be liked, and after yesterday's paeans of praise to all things Russian, I thought his narrow, categoric, racist streak is the downside of life here. He has never been outside Moscow and he's been bombarded with the weirdest information most of his life.

As I left Moscow, the police were frogmarching two men through the barrier. As I arrived in Heathrow police were also frogmarching two men through the barrier. The woman at the transfer desk was *very* British-looking: a "certain age", spectrally thin, terylene top, light perm. I was looking at her and wanted to say, "You look so British", but thought better of it. I waited for the Manchester plane, sitting opposite a middle-aged couple, who also looked eminently British. They were sitting apart, reading the Sunday papers and not saying a word to each other. I wanted to ask, "Are you married? You look so British", but decided to keep my mouth shut. Listened to my tapes and arrived home on a wonderful high.

Sunday 24 March

Oh, that first grapefruit, that first piece of Kit Kat.

BACK IN THE USSR: APRIL–JUNE 1991

Tuesday 9 April

It's quite difficult being back. I'm in a sort of daze, which I suppose is the culture shock. I flew back on Sunday. This time the Foreign Ministry in Moscow sent *no* confirmation of my visa, but the London Consulate decided to give it to me anyway within forty-eight hours "because they know me". It's all very strange.

I travelled out with a German research chemist who's based in Ostashkov to the north west of Moscow Region. He said there had been shooting there during the referendum and it had been difficult for them to leave the hotel. None of this was reported, I don't think. It took a mental effort to shift away from friends and food and drink in London, back to this.

There'd been a mix-up about my flat and Chris wasn't in by the time I got there. So I sat out in the landing, reading, until 10.00pm. I could hear my neighbour on the phone, first of all talking about her ration cards for vodka and sugar, then about a jumper and skirt she fancied. I felt oddly at home.

It was the Russian Orthodox Easter weekend. As I went to bed the phone rang and a peremptory voice said, "Marjorie Farquharson? Christ is Risen!" as though it was a message especially for me. I couldn't bring myself to say, "He has risen indeed!" to this voice, but it also seemed impudent to say, "Who's speaking?" So, I stammered. It was someone wanting to meet up.

On Monday I slept till midday, then took stock. Thirteen people had written to my PO box number, including nine Ukrainians following up the interview Heather and Ulla gave: "Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." The others were from Kazakhstan. The PO box at least seems to be working.

The exchange rate has gone from £1:10 roubles, to £1:48 roubles, apparently very close to the street rate, so a big step towards convertibility. Milk has doubled and bread quadrupled. I noticed it was being sold in smaller portions than before, presumably to help people on a fixed income. There seemed to be more food in the shops; I bought butter for the first time, and that was just in the shop next door. It's hard to know if the government is putting goods in the shops to sweeten the pill of high prices, or if the higher prices are regulating the demand.

Things looked quite different when I got back. The snow had gone and people were painting walls, railings and bus shelters. One of the garden benches outside my window had been moved and the tree behind it cut down. A smell of burning kept coming into the flat and I

saw families out burning piles of dead grass. Spring.

The procrastinations began today: the computer firm, the Foreign Ministry, the Premises Fund, all putting me off to later in the week. Emotionally I was out of it all day, reluctant to embark on this daunting assault course again. The church bells were jingling for twenty minutes, three times today, and it was like tinnitus in the background. I had my first visit of the season from my landlord. I would love to know one day what his role is.

It's been a real withdrawal of company and fun, as well as of food and drink, but writing this diary has focused me for the first time since my return. Tonight I stuck Georgia O'Keefe flowers on the inside of my window frames. For the last two days I've been looking foreign in the street and I wanted to. Now I think I feel more like blending in.

Thursday 11 April

I'm sitting out on my balcony in sunglasses, bare feet and T-shirt, enjoying the evening heat. A woman is going past in boots with her coat buttoned up to the throat. There's a wee haze around the pussy willow tree opposite and bits of green are sprouting on the stretches of brown mud in the courtyard. The place seems to be swarming with children, climbing on roofs, racing about and hitting things. It's at least +15 degrees during the day here but people warn it will go cold again.

Yesterday Leonid from SOVAM Teleport came round to set up my electronic mail system and it was a classic case of culture clash, which left me angry. The British computer firm led me through the system explaining step by step and answering all my questions as we went along. Leonid worked away in stony silence and whenever I asked a question he would say, "What do you mean? Forget about it – not worth bothering about." Some of this might have been the Soviet attitude to teaching, but I think there was a lot of computer macho there – this mean moody guy with the machine mystique. However, he made quite a cock-up with the word processing program and left naked wires hanging out of my phone plug, simply because he was too lazy to tidy up after himself I think. When he left I had a defunct word processing program and no idea how to work my electronic mail.

In the afternoon I went down to SOVAM Teleport to sign our contract. It was more boy meets toy – Andrey at the keys this time with a woman sitting next to him in total blank confusion. A guy who was declaiming in the office to a vast imaginary audience asked me how long I'd been in Moscow because I was looking tired. "Three months," I said. "I thought it was three years," he said. I didn't tell him it was three days. I signed the contract for a trial two months, "depending on the service". They then waived the $200 registration fee.

I walked home from the Foreign Ministry in the sunshine. People were sculling down the Moscow River. I took time over preparing dinner. There's much more fresh stuff available now: dill, cucumber, cabbage, eggs, *tvorog*. Slept through till 10.00am again. I'm terribly depressed. Things are alright but I just woke up wishing I wasn't here in Moscow. It seems people either shout at me, or speak because they want something.

Today I went off to the north east of Moscow to visit "Christ is Risen" – a Bashkir who is severely disabled. He had false legs, a steel corset and a neck brace. He'd lost the use of his right fingers after he was shot high up in his right arm as a partisan (he showed me the scars) and he read things with a magnifying glass. He greeted me with his trousers hanging off on a piece of string and it only occurred to me later that he had trouser brace clips hanging off a rail to hold up his curtains. The flat was very clean and so was he. He had Jewish, Christian and Muslim pictures propped around the room, and also Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son*. This time I noticed how the light falls on the eyes of the jealous brother. I sat in the still airless warmth for two hours and heard his life story. Among other things he'd dossed at railway stations for four years when he was homeless.

The promised documents for registration have still not appeared at the Foreign Ministry, so what's new. As I clipped my bus ticket, the bits fell into the bouffant hair of the woman underneath, unbeknown to her. So did everyone else's.

Friday 12 April

A really beautiful morning. I stood out on the balcony before breakfast feeling at last I've slept myself out. The Foreign Ministry gave me my documents for registering with the local police today, so perhaps we're making progress. Last time it took seven weeks. This time too they registered me as "the representative of Amnesty International" – a very positive sign, everyone says. I carted the computer into town in the afternoon and Leonid actually went through my electronic mail and word processing systems slowly and thoroughly, explaining things to me. I appreciated it a lot and told him.

In the evening I flew back home to meet Nikolay from the Moscow Amnesty group at 9.00pm, startling a girl sitting on the steps in the dark in her nightie when I got out of the lift. She fled like a nineteenth-century heroine, but later came back to ask me the time. I don't know if she was locked out or what.

While Nikolay and I talked there was suddenly a huge explosion and then the back yard lit up. Not shell fire, but immensely powerful fireworks for Cosmonauts' Day. The dogs were all terrified. Nikolay had told me he has a tortoise and I asked if she would be frightened.

“The fact is, she has no ears,” he answered solemnly.

I almost missed my tube stop today watching a pale woman with glasses tatting with pale thread. All her fingers were ticking up and one hand darted backwards and forwards with an apparently invisible thread. Every so often she’d undo a minute knot with a small hook. It looked about as relaxing as undoing a telephone wire.

The strike in Belorussia has been temporarily lifted. One of their demands is Gorbachev’s resignation. It’s strange that this was the venue for his presidential campaign in February/March; they gave a huge yes vote in the referendum on 17 March; and four weeks later they’ve made their biggest show of political dissent to date.

Saturday 13 April

I very much enjoyed today. Wrote letters in the sunshine on the balcony this morning. Five more letters in the PO box, which makes eighteen for this week. I shopped at the Danilov Market then went over to Michurinsky Prospekt to visit friends of Helena’s family. I popped round at four for tea then ended up staying for a riotous dinner and left at midnight. Various of their friends had come round to welcome Yasha back from Paris, and they were all very positive to me and to Amnesty, and all absolutely charming about including me in, and translating slang etc. I came away with a new translator, a possible taker for Brian’s play, an interview with the *Moskovsky Komsomolets* newspaper, and a potential Russian-language coach.

The Academy of Sciences had offered Yasha a plot of land outside Moscow to grow his own food. Apparently all his colleagues were offered the same. One woman at the dinner was going to take up a farm in Tver region, twelve hours away. We ate and drank with gusto while two dark-eyed children sat and watched us at the end of the table, like Fanny and Alexander. The conversation got round to political limericks and rude jokes and we learned how to say “sweet FA” in each other’s languages. I liked one of the Brezhnev jokes: during the Olympics he was handed a speech with the Olympic logo on it and began to read, “Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh…”

Sunday 14 April

The day began and ended with narrow Christianity. A dour Scottish voice on the World Service said we had grown soft on good and evil in the name of “tolerance”, and we should go tough on them again. “It’s like science – positive and negative.” For me the analogy told me more about him than about good and evil.

Then at the Quakes in the evening we were visited by a Christian businessmen’s fellowship from the UK, who arrived in an Intourist bus and wanted to see “Russian Christians”. They were very anxious about whether Islam is gaining ground in the USSR and one Scottish voice asked how Christian evangelists could attract more people here than

they do in Scotland. By making their religion bigger, I would have thought. I came home with two Russian bibles to give away, and was touched to see an inscription in the front of one, written painstakingly in Cyrillic by a lady in Albert Street, Millom.

I had a lazy day. I put my sour milk in a hankie and hung it from a stick on the balcony to make cheese. Karmit rang, just back from a whistlestop tour of the USSR. After Dushanbe she said she flew in to Moscow and thought, *Ah – freedom!*

Monday 15 April

I went to Avtozavodsky district early in the morning to see Karmit before she flew home. It reminded me of Glasgow in the 1960s: very heavily industrial with traffic careering through and things brown with impacted dust. People chatting in doorways looked pale and poor too, and the stairs and door to Karmit's flat were exactly like my grandmother's tenement. Karmit had been seeing sometimes a hundred people in a day during her trip. In the hour I was there she saw five. She's soon going back to Israel to help with family problems. Their flat got blown up by a Scud missile. Some people's lives…

On my way back I went to register at the Visa Department and, amazing to relate, I was in and out in twenty minutes – no queue, no fights, no nothing. Before doing an interview with the legal journal, *Za i Protiv*, I had lunch out in a park. A lorry rolled up, two men got out and made us all get up while they moved the bench about two feet further along. They then went round all the other benches doing the same thing. There was a Mexican wave of people scrambling to their feet clutching their Pepsis and food and bags.

The interview was quite good: about the Soviet scene and international standards. I felt he was asking genuine questions, like "What is an inalienable right?" I stood waiting for a bus outside the KGB and noticed there is actually a constant traffic of normal-looking people going in and out of it. Unnerving.

In the evening I took presents to Bridget Dunbar's friends. The grandmother was portly, in glasses and a housecoat. It turns out she is an Honoured Artist of the Russian Federation and a former star of operetta. She'd just got a tape of her radio recordings today and played me some, including an operetta by Shostakovich (about the new dormitory suburb, as it was then, at Novocheryomushinsky)! Her voice was beautiful and her four-year-old grandson leaned back and started stroking her when the music began. I got a sense of what a grand lady she must have been. She and her daughter have also been offered plots of land by the theatre where the daughter works.

Another nocturnal visit from Dr Yury Savenko past eleven o'clock and then bed. The cheese I made in the hankie tastes really lovely.

Tuesday 16 April

Things are beginning to move. The MP Galina Starovoytova had agreed to chase up our premises for me today. It turns out the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises has now been shifted directly under the Executive Committee of Krasnopresnensky District Soviet. It must approve the recommendation of the Deputies' Commission, then the request goes to the Privatisation Commission (?) under Kotova. Galina told them that Amnesty's request for premises was a precondition for the USSR holding the human rights conference in Moscow this September, and leaned on both the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises and the Privatisation Commission so that they will treat our request as a top priority. She's going to try to call the Executive Committee at Krasnopresnensky tomorrow. As she put it: "There are three links in the chain and two are in our pocket already." I could never have hacked through the undergrowth to get to this point on my own.

I feel things are moving in the wider world too. People keep emphasising the extreme tension in Moscow. I missed two weeks and so may not be in touch with the real mood, but to me it seems there is a slight relaxation. I have just watched a good documentary on the former prisoner of conscience, Vladimir Osipov, and the Russian nationalism he represents – and this was on the Moscow channel, not the more adventurous Leningrad one. Gorbachev has brought Aleksandr Yakovlev back in to the Presidential Council again as "senior advisor", and yesterday I read a good piece in *Izvestiya*, larded with references to Lenin and Marx, but also citing the Eighth UN Congress on Crime and arguing against simplistic approaches to stamping out crime. It said humane punishments are more effective than harsh ones.

My day began at 8.00am with a visit from the landlord, looking more tense and driven than ever. He's trying to cut down on his sleep and is doubling his working hours. I ended up revising his translation until 11.00pm. It was very good.

I went back to the bleak monastery at Kolomenskoye today, this time to meet the ex-prisoner of conscience, Oleg Gorshenin. He was looking great, in a baseball cap, his hair growing back after prison, and relaxed and happy, the way people often are when they have been through a big test and come out the other side. Another conscientious objector was with him, who was very nervous and kept looking round behind us.

When I passed the church on Serpukhovskaya today various people were looking up at the window in the dome, where some man was working in his labouring togs. He was lowering a very large long radiator out of the window on a shaky pulley. As we watched he reminded me of the scene in *Andrei Rublev* where the peasants watch the church bell being levered into place and the cast being broken.

Wednesday 17 April

Valya woke me this morning, ringing to say *Literaturnaya Gazeta* has published a one-page piece on Amnesty. She was very excited and so was I. I tracked down a copy: it was a description of work in the office in London, 85% favourable, and then – more exciting I thought – the twelve recommendations we made to the Soviet government after our visit in 1989, with a commentary by a Soviet professor of law, also mostly favourable.

In the afternoon I managed to get through to London by electronic mail. A red letter day. I rang Leonid at the computer firm and he said with genuine pleasure and relief, "Wonderful!"

I then took mail down to the courier service on the Warsaw Highway. The post may be express but the service isn't, but this time it wasn't me who lost my temper. The assistant went for her lunch break when there were still ten people in the queue and only twenty minutes till the desk closed altogether. She began a grand soliloquy, saying, "Aren't I human, can't I have lunch?" A man and woman ahead of me went absolutely mad. "Of course you can, but if we'd known we wouldn't have trekked all the way across Moscow to watch you!" Behind us a young man with one arm was trying to get a parcel of books ready for posting. The assistant just gave him a sheet of paper and told him to get wrapping. He asked me to put it on the floor then refused all further help.

In the evening I went down to the student residences at Yugo-Zapadnaya for dinner with Margaret. She made a great meal from very simple things. There was a rather finely worked cloth on the table which I assumed was some family heirloom from home. However, she said it was just an old rag she had picked up then *tatted* round the edges. So – tatting reviled and tatting redeemed all in one week.

The shower was like *Psycho* this morning – so much rust in the water.

Thursday 18 April

This was a very varied day. At 12.00 I went to meet Tatyana Sudakova of the Moscow Committee of Human Rights Fighters. She's in her forties, handsome in a Mayakovsky-like way, and knows what she wants to do and why. They are a smallish group and, amazing to relate, have no hankering for money or technology. A friend was letting her use his flat. It was in a courtyard behind Gorky Street and remarkably quiet. The first room was bare but for three dog bowls and some pools of animal pee on the floor. We sat in a room with a bra hanging over the back of the chair and Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Predator on the wall. '*Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?*' was on the radio. Our host was a very dapper man, trying to set up his own business,

who nicely brought us tea. A young woman in a flimsy dressing gown flopped in and out, but we were never introduced.

Tatyana deals with local lawyers and I hoped to find the names of people who would help with civil liberties cases which are outside Amnesty's mandate. She was quite useful in that respect. The subject of rape came up, and all of us betrayed our different cultures. Tatyana thought "attempted rape" should be made a less serious offence and requalified as "hooliganism". I thought that would reinforce the habit of treating women like objects. We got talking about a specific case in Donetsk where a woman was raped by two men and left with her clothing and tights torn. Our dapper host overheard and suggested that not only might she have wanted it, but she might even have *paid* for it. We were all looking at each other in disbelief at one point or another.

Today is the first time I've been aware of being followed in Moscow. When we went into the flat a young guy was hanging about near the doorway watching us, and I could hear a walkie-talkie crackling under his coat. When we came out I looked behind, and an official-looking man with a raincoat came out behind us and got into a car. I think all this may have been for Tatyana's benefit rather than mine, because she has been helping to organise Vladimir Bukovsky's visit. He's here for the first time since he was expelled as a prisoner in 1976.

I then went to see Tanya Ilina, bringing her our paper on Turkey to translate. Kutuzovsky Prospekt, where she lives, is the long, straight, broad highway out of town, lined with grand apartment blocks for the elite, designed to delight Stalin's eye as he drove out of town. Her block had a plaque to Andropov on the wall. Inside there was a broad and light courtyard with a view through to the Moscow River. Tanya had invited Vladimir Chernyega round to meet me. He is the former Vice-Rector of the USSR Diplomatic Academy and now Senior Counsellor to the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs. In one year the ministry has expanded from twenty to 200 people. Chernyega's perhaps forty, with a closed, tense face and charming manner. His attitude towards me was more complicated than Tanya's, but he expressed an interest in receiving our material.

After tea there I went to meet Alexander Kalinin at the Timiryazev monument. He's a Deputy of the Moscow Soviet and a Quaker sympathiser, and I took an immediate liking to him. He was freezing cold and nervous about a demonstration he was arranging for the demilitarisation of Soviet society. Because of a mix-up over permissions, he was afraid it would be broken up with truncheons. I lent him my gloves and followed him at a distance to watch the demonstration. Oleg Gorshenin and friend were there and came up to

chat.

It was a lovely spring evening and I ended the day at the Conservatoire with Bill Millinship of *The Observer*, listening to last year's Tchaikovsky Prize Winner, Boris Berezovsky, play Mozart, Schubert and Chopin. We discussed whether or not things are more relaxed. He thinks they are and it's because Yeltsin, Gorbachev, Lukyanov and Pavlov are all away. He'd been in the Kremlin a few weeks ago, in the part where Gorbachev works, and bumped into Alexander Yakovlev wearing a cardigan, as though he lived there.

Friday 19 April

Another varied day. This has been a very interesting and quite productive week. My blues have gone.

A very cagey voice rang and said, "It's Vladimir, we met yesterday." I cast my mind back over the demonstration, assuming it was someone from there, but realised it was the ex-Vice Rector of the USSR Diplomatic Academy. He offered to help Amnesty with our accreditation here, so I should call him if need be.

I gave an interview in the morning to Nikolay's journalist friend Kostya and was OK until I got self-conscious about my Russian. Then I went off to meet Misha, who has agreed to be my private coach. He is a linguist and teacher at Moscow University. I like the way he speaks and the way he explains derivations. He gave me lunch at his place near the Yasenovo woods. From seeming rather depressed and withdrawn at Natasha's dinner party last week, he was immensely relaxed and easy to talk to today. He's refusing to take any money from me, which may be kindness and may also be that he doesn't want any financial link with Amnesty. It's an odd feeling to arouse suspicion in people so regularly. Talking to him it occurred to me that the Russian language is a bit like a Russian plug. All the bits inside the sentence are constantly moving and declining, and if you stick in a negative suddenly the whole lot shifts around again.

I spent three hours at the women's art gallery in the afternoon with our campaign material about women on display. They've rehung some pictures since I was last there and there seemed to be a bad atmosphere between two of the women, so it was rather a demoralised little troupe. However, their tactics with people dropping in were awful – totally offhand, like Soviet shop assistants. I made a point of at least smiling at people and going up to exchange a few words with them, and it made a hell of a difference to the atmosphere. However, I only got rid of four leaflets. Maria Esmont, the exhibition organiser, is a natural live wire. She immediately came up with the idea of a poster competition for Amnesty and donating pictures to use as postcards. Her collective listened with scepticism and apathy. The most sceptical is the one who smiles at me most. I notice she never touches any of

the Amnesty material Maria hands round.

Krasnopresnensky District Soviet are now offering us 80 square metres at a different address, which they say is also in the centre of town. Details to follow next week. Blow me down, I'd decided to have an evening without politics, when suddenly the main TV news carried our report on Kuwait – with no commentary and no other sources cited! The tide really is turning.

Saturday 20 April

It was very warm and sweaty outdoors today, but chilly inside. In the evening it rained very heavily, then there was a beautiful sunset, which reflected in the puddles. I worked my way through the electronic mail handbook. My computer really is a fantastic machine, able to switch between electronic mail, fax and telex with one command, and send messages out from Moscow via San Francisco to my electronic mailbox in Finsbury Park. I feel my messages are falling from the heavens through various gateways to London EC1. The plug on my printer blew.

Sunday 21 April

I cleaned and tidied in the morning. As the weather has got warmer a really horrible smell has started hanging round the stairway, as though something is lying dead somewhere. I went for lunch at the Teplitskys'. It was so nice to have her open the door in jeans, wave me in, and dash back to the kitchen, where she was trying to make me some Yorkshire puddings. It was another fantastic meal, with fish stew cooked with laurel leaves – apparently a common spice here – *smetana* cake, and homemade cherry wine. I feel very much at home with them. Yasha arrived back from the train station with vegetables his parents had sent them from Odessa. This putting of things on trains has largely replaced the ordinary post. What a trachle.

I went from there to the Quakes. A Lithuanian was there who brought us cheese with cumin in it. He was from Kaunas but had happened to be at the TV tower in Vilnius in January when the Soviet troops had tried to storm it.

I'm in a dreadfully emotional state. Any kindness makes me feel like crying and any lack of kindness makes me feel the same way. I feel very much thrown onto my own resources and they feel very slight. I keep thinking of Paul Auster and *Moon Palace*. The character there is gripped by the idea that travellers in olden times only knew where they were by figuring out the stars. They had to know what was where up there before they knew where they were down here. Experiences far away from home certainly do define you very sharply. I suppose the stars are the same everywhere, but you only look at them when you're travelling, i.e. actually going somewhere, so maybe there's comfort in that.

There are red flags on my building again, for Lenin's birthday. At night I watched the good Sunday arts programme, this time on wartime musicals. Very like British ones, except that the heroine sang a damn sight better than Gracie Fields.

Monday 22 April

I worked at home in the morning then went to see Yelena in the afternoon. She is a lovely person – when she smiles to greet you the smile stays on her face while she is hanging up your coat and afterwards. She had a dog with her – Kara – who lived with her for three years in exile. She invited me to have my summer holiday with her in the hut where she was exiled at Krivosheyno on the River Ob. Rather an unusual summer holiday, but I would like to. I had brought macaroons and she walloped through them as though she hadn't eaten for a week. I asked if she was hungry and she said, "No, they just taste very nice." She was just back from her first trip abroad, to France and Germany. In her mild way she said she'd never noticed before how dusty Moscow is. She agreed to publish our advert in the journal she produces about prisoners.

After paying more visits to other people, I met Kate at the Kropotkin metro in the evening to hear an amateur concert at the House of Scholars. It was a nice place with good buffets and excellent amateur paintings on display. The smell of the toilets, however, haunted me throughout the concert, in the buffet, and even now as I write this. The conductor was pretty dire and reduced everything to the same speed. Came home in the heavy rain.

One of the women in the post office is terribly sour, but I realised today what a ridiculous job she has. It was she who handled my phone bill, then she wrapped my book and registered it, then she sold me some stamps and envelopes – all the time, being pestered for *poste restante* mail and trying to wrap up newspapers people had subscribed to.

Tuesday 23 April

Snow! Today's *leitmotif* was vodka. I went to take my bottles back to the glass recycling shop and got mobbed by people who needed bottles to buy booze at the shop next door. They had their hands in my carrier bag and were stuffing money in and taking it out of my purse. It quite pissed me off. There's a great shortage of glassware.

Then I made the trek to see my Bashkir invalid. His neighbour popped by, bringing him his vodka rations for March and April. Today seemed to be the ration day, because there were all sorts of men tottering across the road drunkenly by lunchtime. I found it quite unpleasant today, after my experience in the bottle bank. Vanzetti has been passing blood for 10–15 days now, but is convinced that he is being irradiated through the wall. It is not unusual for people here to

sense a threat from one source and interpret it as a political threat from another source. I find I start to do it myself. In this society I think it's not surprising, when no one thinks anything happens by chance.

After getting another stamp from the Visa and Registration Department, I went up to the Leningrad Station and, after standing in several wrong queues, got myself a ticket for the weekend. Three stations stand facing each other up there: the Leningrad was built in the mid-nineteenth century and is graceful and classical; the Kazan station opposite is red and grey, like a rather rococo Kremlin; then there is the wonderful Yaroslavsky station in Art Nouveau style. Quite fabulous and pleasing on the eye.

I met Oleg Gorshenin at 5.00pm and he took me to meet his friend, Father Nikon, who turns out to be a young man and a priest of the hitherto banned True Orthodox Church. The flat where he lives with his sister is his church. There were icons on the wall and a long poster crowded with a picture of the Kremlin, Christ on the cross, the saints and members of the Tsar's family. At first sight it reminded me of the people who crowd the cover of the Sergeant Pepper LP, and oddly enough it turned out Father Nikon is a mad-keen Beatles fan and sees them in quite transcendental terms. He put on his long black vestments and a black velvet hat with silver cross, and I thought maybe we were going to have a service, but this was simply to talk with me and then to make the sign of the cross over the vodka, before we began our meal.

I wondered if there was some element of showmanship in all this. There was something quite diabolic about this athletic and expressive figure in black, entertaining us all with real charm. His poor sister worked away in the kitchen and did not eat or drink with us. Every time she began to speak Nikon would interrupt and say we really should listen to her because she is a clever woman. It was as though he feared we would be bored unless he was pepping up the atmosphere. One of the guests was a True Orthodox taxi driver and they all drove me home at 1.00am, Father Nikon in a black Homburg and all of us listening to Pink Floyd.

To complete the weird and wonderful, Jimmy Swaggart now broadcasts on Leningrad TV. Nikolay thinks it's because they get the programmes cheap.

Wednesday 24 April

I have my first volunteer. She's Brigitte, a German from the Canadian Section of Amnesty, who came bang on 10.00am and took the mail down to the Warsaw Highway post office. It was a great help to me and I liked talking to her.

I worked away sending our advert to organisations and

newspapers in Moscow, Ukraine and Estonia. At 3.00pm I was just about to go out for some fresh air when the bell rang and in walked a smart middle-aged woman, looking rather like a family doctor. I hadn't the faintest idea who she was. It turned out to be my mistake though, because she was Natalya Ivanovna, a journalist who specialises in medical issues, and I was the one who'd set up the appointment. Not a very impressive start, but I think it turned out to be a very good conversation and she stayed three hours. She had worked with *Meditsinskaya Gazeta* for over twenty years and now works as a freelance, pushing on psychiatry issues. She was very intelligent and politically savvy, and in that Russian way would fall silent when she thought something I said missed the point. I tried to interest her in the issue of medical involvement in the death penalty, and also to encourage Soviet doctors to join Amnesty. The phone rang and while I answered it, she went over and mended my television plug, sitting amid a pile of my cast-off clothes. Rather a homely scene and a very easy, *Russian* way of behaving. She invited me to meet her daughter, who incidentally studied with Oleg Vakulovsky, the journalist who wrote black propaganda about Amnesty in the 1980s.

In the evening I went to see Viktor, and found a very silent and saddened household. Viktor has been off work for a month, feeling ill. Their grandmother died, I was sorry to hear, on 8 April. Viktor and I sat in the kitchen listening to the taps dripping, he silent and looking troubled. Later, when he was discussing the price rises, he said some friend had brought them some potatoes for a present. His salary as a research chemist is now $10 a month. For some reason a horse was standing on its own at the metro when I left to go home.

Thursday 25 April

My phone has been driving me absolutely bloody mad. It's been working for about twenty minutes a day this week, then going dead or giving a continuous bleep. Today I banged it on the couch so hard I gave myself a headache. Later I saw sparks coming out of the wire, so insulated it with sellotape, and suddenly the phone began to work again.

Dom, a correspondent for the *Moscow Guardian*, came round with very beautiful red freesias to do an interview on Amnesty for his paper, which is a sort of ex-pat gossip sheet. I was invited to the Norwegian Embassy at midday to meet two people from their Immigration Department in Oslo who handle refugee cases. They are trying to assess the risk would-be refugees would face if they returned to the USSR. One of the embassy staff had good views on the USSR, I thought. He said the Western press was committed to the cohesion of the USSR and to Gorbachev's role in this process – an ahistorical approach he said, and I must say I agree with him. Shevardnadze, he

said, was still very active. Some reckon he has made "a brilliant move" and has a long political life ahead of him.

I took materials on North Korea to the Deputy Editor of *Moscow News* and he immediately offered me an opinion piece in the 7 May issue. He's a bit like editors in films: "When do you need it for?" "Yesterday!" he cried. Quite an offer anyway.

After other rounds, I was knackered when I got home, but it was a beautiful evening. Nikolay came round from the Moscow Amnesty group, to collect his mail from London and bring me a nice loaf of bread from his mum. I think she has told him he should leave after an hour, because he always does. I then did my Russian homework.

Friday 26 April

I must work out some way of handling all the material which is coming to me from London by post and electronic mail.

Had a great Russian lesson. I recited the Pushkin poem I'd learned – "If life disappoints…" – then Misha asked, "Has life ever disappointed you?" and we were off on one of those Russian conversations. I was struck by some of his grammatical examples, which were a great exercise in free association, e.g. "I'm afraid of Prime Minister Pavlov."

Afterwards I spent a fruitless hour at the women's art gallery with our campaign material, then at night I left for a weekend in Leningrad by train. There must have been about sixty people in my open carriage, but when I woke up in the morning they were all dressed and packed with their bedding all neatly rolled up. I hadn't heard a thing, even though I slept badly because of the draughts. Everyone behaves a bit as though they're on an Outward Bound course: disciplined, ready to forego sleep and comfort, and ready to press on regardless.

Saturday 27 April – Monday 29 April

This was a lovely weekend. Ludmila took me for a seven-hour walk on Sunday, looking at the Art Nouveau buildings I wanted to see. Leningrad is so beautiful, but looks wrecked, as though the circus has just passed through. When I arrived early on Saturday I walked down the length of Nevsky Prospekt in the cold sunshine. There were signs of life – renovation and new shop signs – but also bricks had been through three shop fronts, including the Regional College of Advocates. I haven't seen that kind of hooliganism here before.

My liking for Ludmila grew greatly over the weekend. She took me to her mother's birthday party and was ready to run the gauntlet of her highly placed establishment family. There were about ten people there, mostly in their sixties, and Lyuda's younger brother who is in the army. They gave me Stalin's favourite wine, which they'd laid down before perestroyka. When I said I was from Amnesty the table

literally fell silent and I felt as though I was in a French film of bourgeois manners. Lyuda didn't soften the blow and stuck by me, and did the same thing when her brother teased me about being a vegetarian. God knows who everyone was, but at one point one of the women asked in English, "Do you think you are in an ordinary Soviet household?" and I said no, I thought I was in rather an extraordinary household.

Lyuda's husband had brought in beer, and when we got home we sat up watching late night TV and talking till 4.00am. A satirist on the box was talking about how everyone is arming themselves, and Viktor suddenly pulled a gun out of his pocket and slapped it on the table. To reassure me he said it wasn't a real gun, it only fired CS gas (!). Apparently they are legal and people carry them to frighten off the thugs who follow them into booze shops etc.

Two scenes hit me in Leningrad. We passed three Cossacks singing in the metro, down at heel, caps pushed back on their heads. They looked like something from the days of War Communism. We also went to the flea market at Moskovsky Prospekt. The road was being dug up, which didn't help, but the sight of very poor-looking people standing round watching a secondhand umbrella opening and shutting was quite depressing. Also for sale were pieces of wire nine inches long and mismatched shoes. I kept finding myself thinking, *Ooh, that would be useful*, because odd small things are so hard to find here.

I took the plusher Intourist train back to Moscow. As we drew in, music started up on the intercom. In 1975 I remember it was sentimental Russian folk songs. This time it was Grace Jones.

Monday was rather depressing because it rained heavily all day. Our office address is going to be 22 Herzen Street, flat 53. That at least came through today from the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises. Last thing at night the new Portuguese Ambassador to the USSR rang up, wanting to meet. This is really a very unusual job.

Tuesday 30 April

Nikolay came early to collect the Moscow group's mail from London. He'd walked all the way – about three miles – because he couldn't afford the 15-kopeck bus fare. At the new exchange rate that is less than a ha'penny. He brought me a lovely and unusual May Day card from his mother, in which she'd copied out part of a W. H. Auden poem for me:

> "There is no such thing as the State
> And no one exists alone;
> Hunger allows no choice
> To the citizen or the police;

We must love one another or die."

She and I met once for five minutes and have developed a great fondness for each other.

My landlord came to complete my registration at the passport desk. While I answered the phone he looked through all my things. He started on again about the authorities' attitude to Amnesty and about whether the KGB has me under surveillance. I couldn't resist saying, "Well, you know better than I do", and he flushed, then said no. We walked to the police department together then, rather oddly I thought, he walked back with me. He's usually in such a tearing hurry. I expected he was weighing up the next favour he was going to ask me, but no, he eventually left me and wished me all the best.

I stayed at home all day working. Drafted my opinion piece for *Moscow News* and read the press. Galina Starovoytova was on TV. She's very smart: she speaks very much to the point and reuses Lenin and Marx to illustrate her own points.

Wednesday 1 May

Half of the bench outside my window got repainted at the beginning of April, but it was never finished. I notice the old women who sit on it can never decide which bit is new. They always sit on one side or the other, but never the whole thing.

I stayed in all day working. People who rang me today were pointedly saying, "Happy Spring Day" and not "May Day", so I did it to other people. I notice *Izvestiya* has dropped its monthly "rags-to-riches" stories. At night I hit the smokes.

Thursday 2 May

I dreamed I was riding a very beautiful black horse and watching the back of its beautiful head. It moved so smoothly you wouldn't think it had four feet. I was a bit nervous of it though and kept it on a short rein, riding it along the pavements. It turned out it had a kind of bag round its nose and was peacefully reading press clippings for me.

I went to change money and also looked up our new premises on Herzen Street. Once again it is a terrific location – just down from TASS, on a backstreet to Moscow Soviet, near Red Square and close to the Arbat metro. The entrance, however, is from the courtyard up a very dilapidated stone stairway, through which you can actually see daylight. The hidden access makes me uneasy about security and the repairs we need are daunting. But there's a lot to be said for it too.

I popped to the Teplitskys' in the evening. They were already two bottles of vodka down so Yasha was speaking English and Italian. Volodya, a consultant to Moscow Soviet, was there. He bemoaned the political scene and I asked him if he'd lost hope. He said no, and his

whole demeanour changed. At the end of our talk he asked me what struck me about Moscow, and when I told him the things I liked, I could see he was suddenly moved. I think people would feel more relaxed if they knew more about other countries. Maybe Amnesty really can play a role there. The whole company got talking about Soviet/Russian poets from the thirties onwards. None of them were specialists in literature, but they really knew the verse and had their own views about it. I have never heard people in Britain discuss Auden, Owen etc. like that.

Friday 3 May

People do come out with some unexpected things. The *Moscow Guardian* rang me to find out when it would be best to send a photographer. I said, "Early morning" and the woman asked, "Why?" The other day the phones were up the spout again and I got the same wrong number twice. The woman at the other end told me to "dial the number properly!" as though I was seven years old and doing it on purpose.

The street trade is very interesting too. At Arbat metro you always get copies of the *Bhagvad Gita* next to a tray of disposable syringes. At Barrikadnaya metro they have a tray of Italian perfume and tins of fish. In Paveletsky metro a dour-looking man sells copies of the *Erotic Digest* in front of a dour-looking woman holding strings of dried mushrooms.

Spring here looks great. The new green trees are like plumes and make a lovely contrast with the dark green firs. It's warm and people are sitting out talking till late. Tonight I went to hear Mikhail Pletnyov conduct the RSFSR National Symphony Orchestra playing Beethoven. It's a new orchestra which he put together from refugees of the old official symphony orchestras, and they are young and very motivated. I don't like Beethoven, but this was great. Pletnyov really hears something new in the music and lets you hear it too – very dynamic, and very musical. The audience gave him flowers as usual, but he gave them to the orchestra and they divided them amongst themselves. If you were looking for signs of a cultural revival you could feel it here.

I had lunch and a five-hour (!) Russian lesson with Misha, then put my new printing machine together. This involved a total rearrangement of every piece of furniture in the room so that I could get the equipment close to the only available electrical socket and the phone socket. Pretty tiring.

Looking back over April I think I was in a prolonged spate of feeling sorry for myself. In the last week I've also felt more foreign than ever before and noticed my points of view are irritating people. I think a change of attitude is called for. There have been some big

plusses: electronic mail, the premises, five press interviews, the Kuwait news release and the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* piece.

Saturday 4 May

The World Service started with an interview with the Monster Raving Loony Green Giant candidate who won a seat in the UK local elections. Various electors were interviewed who said they were really chuffed. It was followed by *Words of Faith*, which was going to look at the Bible from the point of view of the donkeys who appear in it. Bizarre. But really the TV news in the evening was hardly less bizarre. It showed the commemoration service in Glasgow for members of the armed forces who died in the Persian Gulf, and had a soldier barking out in a voice of steel, "The peace of God passeth all understanding." This was followed by Uzbeki dancers celebrating "Pravda Newspaper Day"(!).

Today I went to the monastery in Zagorsk. Oleg and Father Nikon picked me up in Nikon's car – pretty beat-up with no front seat – and off we went, Nikon wearing his cross and his leather jacket. We had to ride with the boot open to try to cool the engine and stopped three times en route for Nikon to try to sort the petrol pump. We arrived in Zagorsk with 'The House of the Rising Sun' blaring from the tape deck.

The monastery at Zagorsk is one of only four *lavras* – top notch holy sites – in Russia, and has now been returned to the believers. For years it has been a plum job for clerics who could find an easy accommodation with the state, and somehow all that tells on the atmosphere. It was touristy and like a museum. It didn't give me the same sense of care and devotion I had at the Danilov Monastery. However, watching Nikon's behaviour with people all day, I came to like him very much and feel he has a real religion. He also exudes *joie de vivre*. We nearly crashed the car on the way home and I got back exhausted.

Sunday 5 May

Decided I've got so much to do I must make the room into more of an office and introduce some more "*poryadok*". Actually had a very productive morning sorting out arrangements for the Sakharov commemoration at the end of the month.

Went to the Moscow City Soviet for a meeting at 3.00pm. It was called by the commission supervising prison conditions, and other non-governmental organisations were there, including "Prison and Freedom", the Group to Defend Political Prisoners, and the Moscow branch of the International Society for Human Rights. It took an hour for everyone to arrive and to start the agenda. We were a motley crew and the meeting itself was shambolic. It made me realise how professional Amnesty is, and how comparatively expert we each are in

our own fields.

The commission wants to improve conditions in line with international standards and to arrange a series of prison visits. I asked if they had copies of the standards, and as an afterthought the chairman said yes, there was one copy somewhere or other. I suggested they cover the whole process, including police cells where detainees are kept, right through to the cells where prisoners are executed – but neither idea was very favourably received. Kirill Podrabinek was good, making concrete suggestions and undertaking to provide information. Somehow he has survived his prison experiences, still helps people, but has moved on and seems inwardly very free. Some other ex-prisoners were there who are still living in the past. They looked wrecked by alcohol and were unable to talk about anything but old prison reminiscences, whether or not they were relevant. The commission itself also seems locked into the old system which it professes to hate. The chairman told us how many judges the Moscow Soviet had sacked, in satisfied tones. What became of judicial independence?

Everyone at the meeting knew who I was and I realised what a high profile this job has. The chairman sat throughout wearing two pairs of glasses at once, which fascinated me.

I took a cab from there to the Quakers, which was an all-Russian affair this week, except for me. After the meeting two of the Russians began talking about "Mother Russia" and "the intelligentsia" in a compulsive way, as though they were sitting round a Hampstead dinner table. Lusya asked me who I was meeting and said of course it would be the "intelligentsia". I said no, actually, and purposely not, and then withdrew from the conversation which was making me feel physically exhausted.

It's interesting; there's quite a bit of complacency and ignorance in this attitude that no one's suffering like they are. It's like a scab they really enjoy picking at and it saves them having to do anything about it. It's also completely insensitive to anyone in Cambodia, Iraq, Indonesia etc. After they left I burst out with this, and to my surprise everyone agreed with me, which heartened me. Nikolay and I stayed on talking with Tatyana, who is marvellous, and my tiredness vanished. Nikolay came back with me in the pouring rain to collect his mail from London. He is kind and devoted, carrying my bag and wading through puddles in his tennis shoes. He is still cutting classes and says he calls them "lessons", because they keep lessening every day.

Monday 6 May

I met the lovely Boris Pustyntsev today, head of the "Memorial" group in Leningrad. He said he would be at the Pushkin monument

carrying a black bag. When I got there, there were nine men with black bags. I approached one of them and he said, “No, I’m from a different opera.” A nice expression. Boris was representing Helsinki Watch and wanted suggestions on how to set up and register an organisation here. Sergey Kovalyov, the head of the Russian Parliamentary Human Rights Committee, told him I had been living here for the last few months, like “a fish on a plate”. Beautiful description, but it just about sums it up.

Yesterday’s meeting at Moscow Soviet seems quite providential. It turns out the lawyer I met there, Natalya Vysotskaya, has a practice in Krasnopresnensky District. We met to talk about the death penalty and then she offered to accompany me to the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises, and she really was good. There seems to be a certain type of professional Soviet woman who is much more courteous and mild than Western professional women, but who really can push. We handed over my letter to the Privatisation Commission, then off her own bat she made rather an impassioned speech about how “we Soviets” should not only pay Amnesty’s rent, but also renovate the premises for us.

On the way home I dropped off UN materials at the Moscow Soviet for the chairman of yesterday’s meeting. This took forty minutes of argy-bargy, unbelievably enough, because no one would believe the chairman was actually a deputy at the Soviet. The woman behind the desk swung from bullying to servility several times during the conversation, as she thought my case lost or gained strength.

Had a nice relaxing evening at John and Olya’s. Olya told me that when Sakharov got shouted down at the First USSR People’s Congress, she’d telegrammed the presidium telling them not to treat him like that. She signed it, “Sidorova, Ivanova, Kuznetsova”. These are the standard names of the milkmaids and other toilers who always sign telegrams here when the righteous anger of the masses has been roused. In the post office she’d met a woman in tears who was also sending a telegram for Sakharov, signed by all her colleagues at the military institute. What a hothouse this is. I was very tired and very hungry all day.

Tuesday 7 May

Today I delivered over 26,000 Amnesty words for translation to different parts of Moscow. One stop took me to meet Oleg at the Institute of State and Law, and I realised it was the first time we’d ever spoken to each other one to one. I found it funny that here was Amnesty and our interpreter/minder from the 1989 visit, having a very relaxed and tired chat. He suddenly broke into English and offered to help me in any way he could, and asked me meaningfully if my phone was always as bad as yesterday, when I called him. It is.

In the afternoon the medical journalist Natalya Ivanovna sent her daughter round to collect our new materials on imprisoned medical workers, to complete the article she's writing. Irina arrived carrying two tomatoes – a terrific treat – because her mother remembered I'm a vegetarian.

I made rather a heart-stopping phone call to the "Unit on Executions" at the USSR Supreme Soviet. It's just struck me how weird the name is. I wanted to find out for Lydia Zapevalova if her son had been executed or pardoned. He'd been pardoned on 30 April – and no one had told her! In fact, after the legal stage had finished, she said she had no right to approach any of the officials involved. I wonder if other systems are like that; it seems immensely cruel. She was too wrung-out to be elated by the news.

I got lucky at 5.00pm and managed to buy eggs, butter and milk – my first milk for five days, although I live next door to a milk shop. A woman stopped me in the street and asked me where I'd got it all and how much it cost. I think the food situation is getting worse, or at least mine has.

I took my Meat Loaf *Bat Out of Hell* tape to Father Nikon, and sure enough, he liked it. He had been called in that day for questioning about the murder of Aleksandr Men last year. The night before both he and his sister dreamed they were trying to call me – which made me feel this is a hell of a responsible job. At the beginning of our dinner two men were outside looking at his car.

Wednesday 8 May

Reading my *Izvestiya* in the morning and listening to music, I suddenly felt immensely happy and at home here. It's the day before yet another public holiday – Victory over Fascism Day – so everything was shutting down early and the flags were out again. *Sovetsky narod prazdnuet na polnom khodu!* I had been hoping for a detailed talk at the Foreign Ministry, but Nikolay Smirnov was in a flat spin to finish everything by 4.00pm, so it was very brief. He said the Foreign Ministry Information Department has decided *against* registering us as an information office after all. What that means I shall have to find out next week.

I went up to Natalya Vysotskaya's legal consultancy at Krasnopresnenskaya. There, there was a nice old man from Georgia, panting with a heart condition, asking for help for his nephew who had been sentenced to death. It was another ghastly murder, but another travesty of a trial. Natalya had worked with him all day, preparing appeals, and I took his details to give to London. He probably couldn't believe that two women in Moscow would devote hours to him to help, and all free of charge. Like Lydia Zapevalova, he was dignified and restrained.

Natalya Ivanovna phoned to say that Amnesty's material had opened up a "new and valuable" aspect of medical work for her. People here look on doctors and psychiatrists with suspicion, and it was an eye-opener to see how they are persecuted in different countries. She will ask her editor if they can run appeals for our cases. Good.

Thursday 9 May

After great troubles Semyon Gluzman got himself a passport and visa for the US to go to a conference of the American Psychiatric Association. He then found that APA confirmation for his ticket had not come through so could not collect it. I offered to buy him one with my credit card. But it turns out the ticket desk at the airport only works from 4.00 to 6.00*am.* Can you believe it?

We're going to be a very odd trio: Gluzman, who's an ex-prisoner of conscience, me from Amnesty, and our driver, who apparently is a professor from the Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry. On the phone Svetlana Polubinskaya was highly amused by this and said everyone else is too. She said the professor is a very nice man – "a murderer, but a very nice man". I don't know how I feel about this.

In the evening I went to see *The Night Porter* with the Teplitskys. There was a strong smell of vodka in the cinema and suddenly a man from the row behind collapsed asleep onto Yasha's back. While Dirk Bogarde and Charlotte Rampling were grinding away in heavy S&M, someone else was snoring. It was a disappointing film, but at the beginning, with its shots of Nazi medicine, it kept making me think of the Serbsky Institute. We came out to rain and a burst of fireworks for Victory over Fascism Day.

Friday 10 May

I love the tree at my window. It's a white poplar, and rustles beautifully in the breeze. The courtyard is a riot of trees, grass, dandelions, and little bushes with delicate white flowers. This has all happened in the last month.

I got up at 3.30am and we got Gluzman's ticket at Sheremetyovo airport with no difficulties. It was a beautiful bright day, the temperature had dropped to +2 degrees, and the roads were empty. The professor said, "I work at the Serbsky, excuse me", and was dashing back to play in a tennis match. I asked him if he'd seen *The Night Porter*, so I suppose that was my subconscious telling him what was on my mind. He thought I was a journalist, and when he heard I was from Amnesty there was a big pause in the conversation. We discussed whether Soviet society is matriarchal.

The Deputy Editor of *Moscow News* invited me for a chat. I thought he hadn't liked my article, but he really *did* want to chat and gave me coffee. He supports Gorbachev on the miners' strike and

favours a meritocracy, or at least voting and election on the basis of education, over a democracy. I said that would have excluded our Prime Minister. He said maybe, but it would have excluded ten idiots too. He has a gap-toothed smile that is quite boyish.

I worked in the afternoon, then took Robin *et al.* to hear Igor Oistrakh at the Conservatoire – unfortunately past his best. They're here to see me on a Thompsons Tour and it was nice hearing their oohs and aahs when they caught first sight of the Kremlin and the chandeliers in the metro. To bed at midnight.

Saturday 11 May

Still beautiful weather, but now much warmer. I had an interesting crop of letters from people wanting to join Amnesty, and others. By now when people say they want my help I feel an almost physical sense of strain. I prepared and printed a standard Russian letter for people wanting to join Amnesty. Robin, Sheila and Helen came round for Moldavian wine and chocolate eclairs, then I took them to 36 Kropotkin Street for dinner. Fantastic waiters and good food – though not what we ordered. We strolled along the Arbat then I took them home. Moscow is looking at its very best for them.

Sunday 12 May

At 5.00am I threw up my mushrooms and sour cream from some deep dark place, then went back to bed feeling fine.

I was seized with rage and frustration in the morning. I remembered when I told Nikolay Smirnov at the Foreign Ministry that Ian Martin is coming next week for the Sakharov commemoration, he said, "Oh, he's definitely coming is he?" – by which I suppose he knows from telephone transcripts that Ian wasn't sure. Every time I dial my phone it sounds back through the radio and I'm so bugged that I'm virtually inaudible to everyone on the other end. I'm so fucking sick of being treated like a criminal while the Foreign Ministry farces about, holding me at arm's length, unable to make up its tiny virgin mind. I've been here nearly half a year and feel I've done damn all.

A great box of food arrived for me today from the office – a great morale boost in amongst everything else.

Armenia has appealed to the UN for help "against Soviet aggression".

Monday 13 May

In the afternoon I collected two translations from the *Journal of Humanitarian Sciences*. They let me in behind the closed door where I thought they all worked in serried ranks, but it was empty except for Valya and Tanya, drinking coffee. The deputy editor and editor-in-chief joined us and we had a nice relaxed chat. They want me to do an article by mid-June.

I would have liked to sit on, but had an appointment to meet Irina Kruglyanskaya at *Izvestiya*. She is the journalist who recently wrote a good piece about the execution of strikers at Novocherkassk in the 1960s. She has a large office to herself on the seventh floor, works on social issues and is promoting free enterprise. The departmental editor, Albert Plutnik, dropped by and I liked him very much. Kruglyanskaya wants to do an interview with me next week anyway, to my surprise.

From there I went to meet Ruslan and a friend of his, who incidentally had been put through the Serbsky Institute in the early eighties, after he tried to visit the US Embassy. They walked me to the Pushkin monument where I met Robin *et al.* for a great dinner at Moskovskye Zori. It had been hot all day, then there was a refreshing shower and as we walked home in the dark everything seemed peaceful.

Tuesday 14 May

Blow me down, the Law on Exit and Entry failed to get through the USSR Parliament.

I worked at home all day and did a Russian translation of our letter to Shevardnadze. London have rather blithely sent me train tickets for the AI member who lives in Drohobych – a tiny Ukrainian town – assuming that Semyon Gluzman would be an intermediary in Kiev. As Gluzman's away, it's been no go, Joe. So Nikolay has been cabling Drohobych, I've been looking for someone to travel to Kiev with the tickets, and a poor Kiev family I do not know has got roped in, trying to find someone travelling to Moscow who could pick them up. All of this has taken many phone calls at 7.00am and midnight, because otherwise the lines are engaged. Now it seems Nikolay or I will have to take the tickets across Moscow on the night train to Kiev so someone can pick them up at the other end. All of this because the post is unreliable. I dread Amnesty's International Council Meeting.

I ran to the Leningrad train, clutching tulips, to wave off Robin, Helen and Sheila. Robin was looking happy and skinny and young, clutching my tulips as we took photos. Then I met Irina to take her to a Mikhail Pletnyov concert at the Conservatoire. She is fascinating. She's tall. However, what strikes you is her great intelligence and wit. We were talking about the tarty look that is so prevalent here and she said appearances were deceptive: sometimes the most disciplined-looking people have towering passions. I think she has. All the friends she played music with have emigrated, and I felt very sympathetic and sorry for her, but realised that's probably quite an inadequate reaction. She's very much her own person. I got the impression she'd come to the concert rather to humour her mother, who feels sorry for me.

At home I called Natalya Vysotskaya to apologise for my catatonic behaviour over the phone yesterday, and the nice woman had drafted a letter for me to send to the Krasnopresnensky Executive Committee about renovating our premises. She says she specialises in tear-jerking letters. It seemed that's the first time anyone has spontaneously helped me – but as I keep thinking it, I realise I'm being helped all the time.

Wednesday 15 May

An early visit from the landlord to deliver his translation. Then came Rachael – my third volunteer – a Cambridge student who feels at a loose end. Looking at her pale face and listening to her, I feel we are all going through some kind of existential experience here, if I knew better what existential means. We're all finding it immensely tough, we're all alone, none of us is really happy, but we're all committed in some way to experiencing what there is here. She sat at one end of the room and I at another, both of us revising translations, and it was nice to have the company. While she was there Tanya Ilina rang. The *Journal of Humanitarian Sciences* was putting in its office's order for food and did I want to be included? Another spontaneous kindness. I explained about my food box from London and said no.

Lunch with the new Portuguese Ambassador. The embassy is on an unprepossessing industrial street, but is a very open, low building with lilac trees in the garden. I could see the ambassador in the picture window, reading his paper, waiting for me. He's been at the UN in New York and Geneva, and also spent three years in China. Only two of them work at the embassy and he covers Mongolia too. We were waited on by a Soviet maid who seemed to make him cringe. He doesn't have Russian, and so isn't into the fascinating minutiae like the man at the Norwegian Embassy, but also perhaps it is a generational thing. He looked at things in broad sweeps, which I wasn't so able to do. He says Amnesty is a "giant" at the UN. Ninety per cent of the 1503 submissions come from us. I do feel a flush of pride when I hear things like that.

From there to the Shevardnadze Foreign Policy Association, clutching my letter and the lists of all the documents we put out in 1990. It's in a former embassy building on a side street and, rather refreshingly, has no furniture. So even they are experiencing premises problems. An electrician was sitting on the floor outside the office where the Executive Secretary, Sorokin, received me. He's young and slim with short, brylcreemed hair, like a London advert. He was also informal and pretty clued up. He'd heard about our plans to set up an office all last year and in principle wants both our organisations to stay in contact. I hope somehow it will help us with our registration. He was explaining the Russian phrase "a wedding General" to me, and

said, “Say you and I were getting married…”. Most people would die rather than use an example like that.

I went out again at 6.00pm to meet Ruslan and his friend Andrey. After talking, Ruslan took us to a place he knows, where we drank a bottle of champagne. It was a bare room above a shop, with pools of rain on the floor, building rubble in the corner, a table at forty-five degrees, and stinking of toilets and mice. However, we could look out of a big window onto the ring road and Andrey said, “Cross your heart – what use do you think AI can be here?” So I told him, and some of my arguments seemed to make sense to him, though not others. It was good practice. They walked me to the Pushkin monument and Andrey, to my surprise, thanked me for the company.

When I got home I waited till midnight to get a free line to Kiev to ring about these blasted train tickets.

Thursday 16 May

Another early morning visit from Nikolay. His mother, the good soul, has agreed to take the tickets to the Drohobych train. Nikolay was in a daft mood, constantly contradicting himself then agreeing with me. I said, “Are you a Yes Man?” and he said “yes”. Then I went to the *Stolitsa* journal to do an interview, which went fairly well. I managed to bring in one of our thirtieth anniversary appeal cases from Vietnam and also to counter Solzhenitsyn’s criticisms of AI.

I travelled to the other end of town to post the mail – that trip is a real drag – then came back to revise rather a poor translation of one of the speeches to the Eighth UN Crime Congress. Funny how hard and time-consuming it is to rework a poor translation. At about 8.00pm Nikolay’s friend Kostya came with his article on Amnesty, which will go to Moscow newspapers then get syndicated to Arkhangelsk, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Baku and elsewhere. I realise he and Nikolay have put in lots of work reading and translating Amnesty publications, and what they’ve come up with is very fresh and balanced and interesting. My bits in it are the worst. Somehow there seems to be a bit more hope in the work. I also got a phone call from Denjoe in Dubno, saying there’s a lot of interest there, and would I come and address a meeting.

When I was scanning *Izvestiya* I found a piece by their Rio de Janeiro correspondent about the Brazilian Health Minister’s visit to Amnesty in London, which vindicates our report on abuses against children in Brazil. Curiouser and curiouser. You could hardly get more oblique than that.

Last night a fly seemed to spend most of the night on my face. I’ve now got cockroaches in the living room as well as in the kitchen and bathroom. It’s probably the weather.

Stolitsa uses paratroopers to staff the reception desk. Two

strapping men sat and watched as two old women carted out stacks of the journals to a distribution van. It's funny, whenever I see workers in motion here they're women, and when they're stationary they're more often men.

Friday 17 May

There are so many cracks in my Academy of Sciences cup that the tea seeped out almost as fast as I drank it at breakfast.

Not a sparkling start to the day. Everyone was out, then the secretary at the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises put the phone down on me *four* times.

I went to my Russian class, which was interesting and helpful as usual. Misha's wife is studying in Yugoslavia and he said he was a bit frightened by her last letter, because she was having such a terrific time and going on holiday in Greece with a new friend she'd made. He, meanwhile, was trying to prepare all the food for their teenage son's birthday party tomorrow. He was trying in every way to remind her of them: sending their photo to await her in Greece, buying her a bag and planning to send her chocolates, but afraid they wouldn't be good enough for her new company. He was also planning to turn up in Greece unexpectedly – always rather a disaster I'd have thought. When his son, Andrey, came back, he seemed rather frightened by *me*, and came out into the hall to ask us what we had been translating and where we were going. It must be very tough for them both.

I did an interview with *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, which has a circulation of 1.5 million. The journalist, Katerina Deyeva, invited me to speak to their anniversary meeting at the end of June, which has a huge audience. There must have been a more personal vibe between us, because I felt I was speaking gibberish.

As I was nearby, I popped in on the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises and amazingly came away with the Executive Committee Resolution and the key to the premises. Olga Ivanovna Lavrova looks so immensely strained and made a battery of phone calls, just because she knew my "President" is coming out here. Fortunately the same hierarchical strain doesn't exist in Amnesty. Mind you, we also work a lot harder without it. Meanwhile, her secretaries sat by idly watching.

I decided not to go home before having dinner with two people from "Memorial". I sat outside the Conservatoire listening to someone practising Brahms' second *Piano Concerto* very well, until a thunderstorm broke and drenched me. Herzen Street turned into a river 9" deep, and so a whole chain of women pedestrians had to negotiate the 3'-high pipe that blocks the pavement. We all held each other's bags and helped each other over, me in a short, tight skirt and high heels. I arrived at the dinner like a drowned rat. The "Memorial" people were two Americans who are helping to computerise the

archive. They too have been finding it tough – they also arrived during the dreadful winter and the Gulf War.

A bomb went off in the headquarters of the Democratic Russia Party tonight.

Saturday 18 May

The Museum of the Revolution has an interesting exhibition of posters which I went to see this morning. Not only Red propaganda but White too, and sometimes they had literally used the same pictures but supplied opposing captions. The fact it wasn't totally Bolshevik or anti-Bolshevik made it very good. Some of the posters in 1918 were like posters in 1991: "X – the only hope of Russia's Salvation!" or "Bolshevism = hunger and violence!"

At night I visited a neighbour, Tamara, who by the oddest coincidence is a close friend of Zaure in Kazakhstan. She's head of a jazz faculty in Moscow, and blow me down, amidst everything else it seems jazz is going through a crisis too. It would be nice to hear about something that isn't. Tamara and her daughter are planning to go to Israel, and her daughter treated me to a barrage of English that was intended to impress but felt like an aggressive assault. Her mother obviously thought so too and sent her to bed.

Tamara was immensely kind to me and has a lovely face, but in the course of the conversation got onto the subject of "blacks", whom she doesn't like, though she's "not a racist", according to her. Soviet racism really is a deep thing and will bring lots of trouble in the future. For me it feels like a yawning gap in front of me when I'm trying to get closer to people I like here.

In the afternoon I cleaned and tidied like mad for Ian's visit – maybe some hierarchical strain after all. I also drafted a longer article for *Moscow News*. I am very tired and can't remember when I last had a day off.

Wednesday 22 May

Ian has been and gone, and a lot has happened since I last wrote up this diary. We mainly pursued the premises and the vexed question of Amnesty's legal status. On the Monday morning we met up with Natalya Vysotskaya and Valya Levina and went to look round the office space at Herzen Street 22/53. It was recently occupied by squatters and was full of rubbish and crap. It's also in need of major repairs. But it has four rooms and a hall and is in a great place. Ian had the bright idea of talking to the neighbours, and Natalya used her charm to get us into what turned out to be a neat little computer firm next door. They said their place had been in even worse nick when they took it over (rent 12,000 roubles/year) and they gave us useful advice on firms to use for repairs. So, bucked up by that we decided to order a security door and set up shop.

We also had three meetings with Foreign Ministry Departments about our status. The Information Department told us they couldn't register us as a press outfit. The Humanitarian Affairs Department was pretty clueless and said, "How would you like to be registered?" The best meeting was with Igor Yakovlev, head of the Foreign Ministry's Legal Department. He made calls to the head of the Information Department, the head of the International Organisations Department and Deputy Minister Petrovsky, and undertook to devise some new status which would fit us and other international organisations. The meeting had its funny sides. We were escorted up by an apparition in chiffon and spangles, who seemed very friendly but a bit dippy. She left us outside the office door, which I couldn't open. Ian gave it a shove and I fell into the room, creating the serious impression we strive for. Later Yakovlev went through his battery of five phones, trying to work out which one was ringing. It was a sort of Dick Van Dyke show brought to Moscow.

In the two days we also attended the Sakharov Conference, amongst many other things. I never thought I would be pleased to see the international human rights crowd, but I was, quite. It was like stepping into another life. The staff at the Rossiya Hotel had loosened the regime for the conference, so it wasn't like crossing the border getting in. All a totally false impression. As word got round more Muscovites and ex-prisoners began to attend the sessions. When they heard that tomorrow's session is to be in the Sovincenter though, they said they wouldn't come because security was seven-deep, and they'd never be allowed through.

One of the US delegates invited me for a drink at the Rossiya bar and I apologised that I don't have any hard currency. He said lightly that if he lived here he'd always carry some. It's no reflection on the Sakharov Conference, which has been pretty good, but to me there increasingly seems to be a major problem about this blindness to wealth. If you were to have a conference about untouchables and exclude all Indians it would be more obvious, but this oblique discrimination is just as effective and few people seem to be bothered about it. I only have the smallest sense of what it's like living here, but I feel most of these people have *none*. The pity of it is that so few Russians or Soviets seem to object. They're not (yet) in a position to.

Real life impinged more today when Viktor crept into the session, looking pale and starved as usual. His mother's legs seem to be paralysed and she can't get out of bed. When he got up to leave I touched his arms saying goodbye and he looked at me with real gratitude. At the end of the row he very embarrassedly blew me a kiss. At night Nikolay came round, on the eve of his first trip abroad – to an Amnesty meeting in Hungary. We sat drinking whisky and I

deciphered the words of the Pet Shop Boys' 'It's a Sin' for him. I lent him my camera for his trip, but he was reluctant to take it because he wasn't sure he would be able to use it, never having had one before. In the morning the landlord had been round, preparing to make the big experiment of putting money in a bank account for the first time. He didn't want to put in too much, because he was afraid the government would not let him have it back on some pretext or other. Quite a realistic fear here, I think.

The highlight of the last few days was definitely the memorial concert on Sakharov's birthday, at the Conservatoire: Sviatoslav Richter, Mstislav Rostropovich and the Virtuosi of Moscow. It had me in tears at many points. They ended with the 'Lacrymosa' from Mozart's *Requiem*. The audience sitting at the back of the stage turned out to be a choir. They began singing sitting down, then slowly rose to their feet as they reached the first crescendo. I'd never seen anything like it and it was immensely moving.

Yelena Bonner said some unusual things for a *maîtresse d'*. In her opening speech she said, "Very few of you shared the thoughts and ideas of Sakharov; even fewer of you were his friends; the most you can say is that you were alive at the same time that he was in history." Absolutely true. When the Dutch Academy of Sciences gave her a medal for Sakharov she said, "This is a lesson in doing things on time. You were late in inscribing it and now you have to give it to me and not him." She is largely driven by "*zlost*" and anger it seems, but I think she has earned the right to say all these things. She must be sickened by human nature as displayed over the decades to Sakharov. When she and Rostropovich were together on stage it was like a family show, Gorbachev sitting unacknowledged throughout in the box nearest the stage. The whole evening was both solemn and informal, and matched the occasion perfectly. I wondered what a Hollywood version would have been like.

It was very nice to have Ian here, both because he was someone to compare impressions with and take decisions, but also because he is so quick on the uptake on the Soviet scene. On the human level too he came carrying a big heavy bag of presents from him and the London office, and he also seemed to be prepared to spend a lot of time with me, just talking.

A few weeks ago I looked at the Old Testament to reread the story about Samuel, but I found the stories so good I've carried on reading, and am now up to Nehemiah, reading things I've never looked at before. The stories are all set in a political context, and people's bad sides only seem to make them come a cropper when they pretend to be better than they are. People's psychological motivation is very modern and very clear. What has kept me reading is that almost every

day the story has fitted what I am doing. Just as I am contemplating the renovation work we need in the office, Ezra and Nehemiah are considering the repairs of Old Jerusalem and economic inequalities are giving Nehemiah pause for thought. A local human rights wallah has also just appeared on the scene as Sallambat, Tobiah and Geshem the Arab, disparaging the building efforts. No Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises to contend with yet.

Friday 24 May

Today I ground to a halt. Stayed in bed till 10.30am then had a blissful day at home. I prepared letters on the premises, and basically tidied up loose ends before the big leap forward into new waters/bogs in June.

I took the laundry in – something I've been trying to do for four weeks – and on the way home found the local cake shop was selling chickens, so I bought one. The local church has erected a scaffold on its grounds and installed a beautiful big bell. I could hear it tolling tonight and it was deep and peaceful.

Saturday 25 May

This was the last day of the Sakharov Conference. I bumped into Yelena Bonner's daughter and asked how the fact-finding trip to Armenia was going. She said, "Mother's written to Gorbachev again", as though this was the most normal thing in the world, which for her it is. By the end of the day they had the official permission to do the trip.

I was very impressed by the conference. It was businesslike, as far as great discussions like that can be, and it came up with some half-sensible suggestions, particularly on legal procedural reform. When Baroness Cox was intoning the recommendations of our working group, some people from the audience silently went on stage and began holding up posters about their misfortunes. Yelena Bonner's gentle son went to speak to them, but they didn't move until Yelena Bonner marched onto the stage in a fury and shoved them off.

She later told the auditorium that they'd fought to get free access for all to the plenaries, but it wasn't a demonstration and anyone who tried to disrupt the meeting would get thrown out. Very few people would have dared to say that, or if they dared, very few would have got away with it – but she has indeed earned the authority.

The day ended with a press conference in which successive Soviet journalists, official and unofficial, tried to imply Bonner had sold out or that the conference would not be following up seriously on prison reform etc. Most people on the platform were put on the defensive, until Bonner took the microphone and said, no, the conference would not be doing follow-up work. She had worked round the clock for eighteen months to put it on: "Now *you* do the follow-up work

yourselves! You're not three-year-old children. You're all adults. There are 150 MPs here. Organise it yourselves!" My liking and admiration for her rose throughout the week. She's not only honest, she's smart. But I was struck again how harsh the Soviet press and public are.

Irina and her mother were there and I sat with them in the morning. Irina was talking about literature again and said when she was at university they were all taught that capitalism was going through a crisis and as they waited for the crash they watched it reflected in the literature. She gave a merry laugh. She said Mandelstam wrote so well as to be almost incomprehensible: "… and in our country if we don't understand something, we kill it".

I had an early night and watched the RSFSR Supreme Soviet discussing its draft law on a constitutional court. As there is not yet a multi-party system I don't really understand the procedure they use, but the presidium seemed businesslike and the Congress was packed with people.

Sunday 26 May

It was a glorious day and I walked down to the riverside. It could have been Holland or provincial France on my stroll: cafés, people strolling clutching bunches of lilac. I sat with a fisherman, watching a festival on Red Square for Whitsuntide. Pleasure boats went by playing rock music. The fisherman told me you could catch huge fish at the riverbank and held out his hands. Here too. Someone had written "My heart beelongs you" in the dust on a lorry parked near us.

My courtyard was lovely too. The trees give a nice shade and a group of men were out slapping chequers on the table near the rubbish containers, while I ate my ice cream. It was almost too hot to be out.

Tamara took me to the jazz festival at the Palace of Culture attached to the Moscow Physics Institute. We watched them warming up and as usual some incredibly bad-tempered administrator came and shouted at the sound engineers. Tamara said Soviet people were bad tempered from morning to evening and she was sick of it. Me too. It was a mixed blessing going to the concert with a jazz expert, because she was intensely critical and intellectual about it. At the first interval we went backstage and she and her friend Bella demolished the acts. "It wasn't jazz", "It was *not* jazz", they said. Apparently the singer with the headband and indifferent voice is married to the compère.

Bella took us to a backroom and played us some improvisations. She graduated from the Composers' Faculty at the Conservatoire and now plays at the Peking Restaurant and the Russky Traktir. Her classical training was stamped all over her, but her foot was stomping like there was a jazz musician trying to get out.

Bill Skeat was on in the second half with a Soviet trio, including an excellent bassist, Viktor Dvorskin, and good young pianist, Lev Kushnir. They seemed to meet with Tamara's approval too, because she kept saying to me in English, "A fine culture of sound" and "They have think" (?). We travelled home in the van with the performance artists from Minsk. There seem to be a number of interesting things developing in Belorussia.

And now it is thundering.

Monday 27 May

Amazing how yesterday refreshed me. Another hot day. I met Natalya Vysotskaya at Krasnopresnensky District Soviet and we went to collect the next batch of documents in the paper trail leading to our premises. Apparently we have to make a written request, endorsed by the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises, for a ground plan of Herzen Street 22/53. This has to go to the Bureau of Technical Administration then come back to the Fund. The woman insisted we type our request on an Amnesty letterhead, which I didn't have with me. Natalya very charmingly offered to create our own letterhead and to type the request herself there and then. The woman relented, we got our request stamped, and saved maybe three days or a week of faffing around. By a lucky fluke the Bureau of Technical Administration was open on a Monday, so I got our request in in the afternoon and persuaded them to have it ready by Friday.

Natalya is being great. The day before she'd spoken at the Moscow City College of Advocates and encouraged them to give their time to her legal aid fund. They said now was not the time, because the financial situation was so difficult. She said now was *exactly* the time for poor clients.

Ed Kline invited me to lunch at the Metropol hotel, the newly restored, super-duper Art Nouveau creation in Revolution Square. I went as I was, in T-shirt and jeans. Two women descended on me and asked if I was looking for the service entrance, then three security guards came up and tried to send me to the canteen. Finally made it to the restaurant. Ed's wife later offered me a comb, so I guess today's look was not a whing-ding success. It was fun to see them again and they were kind to me.

Ed asked me if I'm meeting "plain people" and not just the intelligentsia. I'm having no trouble meeting "plain people". It seems to me "intelligentsia" is something other people should call you, but which some people here call themselves. When I got off the bus I bumped into Father Nikon's sister, Ira, at the bus stop. She was so surprised she flung her arms round my neck and kissed me. She's off tomorrow for two months' nursing at a pioneer camp. It's one way she can give her son a holiday.

Tuesday 28 May

A crow gave an immense squawk on my window ledge. I flung on the radio and switched off the alarm, but found it was only 5.20am.

At 2.00pm I went to meet an opposition deputy from the Georgian Supreme Soviet. He was with the representative they hope to base in Moscow. The Georgian mass media is so controlled by Zviad Gamsakhurdia that they are fairly desperately looking for outlets to the world. They came with information on seventy-two prisoners in Georgia and said four people had been picked off the street and "disappeared" for a week. They were held in some kind of garage. Gamsakhurdia has set up a National Guard parallel to the police force.

I don't know what their nationalist outlook would be if you scratched the surface, but they were both mild-mannered and said they oppose the death penalty, rather to my surprise.

At 5.30pm I met Valya, to visit our premises. She brought Tolya, her daughter's boyfriend, who will supervise the day-to-day building work. He seemed very serious about it and I liked him. He's also old enough and just tough-looking enough to be quite handy in the job, I think. However, when we got to the office we found the padlock had been changed. Apparently last week there had been a fire or a flood there. The next-door neighbours said they were lucky they hadn't been burned alive. "Must have been a fire," said Valya, to no one in particular.

Tolya and I went round to the District Exploitation Administration to see if they have changed the lock. Usual scene of bedlam in their office and they shouted at us. Apparently they hadn't; an international association of orphans is using it to store stuff. Michael Jackson and Vanessa Redgrave are its patrons.

It makes a tremendous difference to have these helping hands at this stage. Perhaps I'm just doing more interesting things, or perhaps I've just been around long enough. I do feel more at home. Yesterday I knew exactly which underpass to drop into to pick up a copy of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. They had an interview with Ian for our thirtieth anniversary today. They said he was "a man of few words", but I think that may have been because I was interpreting for him. The Russian TV news carried an excellent five minutes on our thirtieth anniversary tonight.

At night another terrific thunderstorm burst and I got drenched. As I got nearer home this was joined by fireworks. The noise was spectacular and it looked like it was raining blood.

Wednesday 29 May

I slept very badly because the thunder and lightning continued till 2.00am and I don't have curtains. Then there were mosquitoes. Was woken at 7.45am by agitated ringing on the doorbell. It was the

postwoman, asking why I hadn't collected a book that had been lying waiting for me for the last month. No one had told me about it, but apparently it was my fault.

Ruslan rang to say he too had got caught in last night's storm and his clothes now looked as though they'd been gone over by a cold iron that had been rubbed in dirt.

I rang my Foreign Ministry minder to tell him I was off to Dubna for the night, then off I set to speak to research physicists interested in Amnesty. Savelovsky is like a village station in the middle of Moscow. You buy your ticket at a Nissen hut and people sit out knitting and reading at the buffers of the train. It was 130km north through deserted provincial Russia, with the odd cupola glinting across vast fields, and two peasant women sitting chatting on a furrow. Dubna is the USSR's answer to CERN. I expected an impersonal science city, but found a leafy provincial town with lots of lilac trees and people cycling by. The river Volga bends north here. The grand old houses were built by German POWs, and the newer science blocks were put up in the last twenty years.

I was met by Denjoe and his Kazakh friend, Arsen, and we had a pleasant afternoon in the sunshine before the evening's talk. There were ten people in the audience, from Bulgaria, Romania, Peru, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, the RSFSR and Eire. I don't know how adequate my talk was, but I realised I did the whole forty minutes and the question time in Russian without any sense of strain, so maybe I am making progress.

We all retired to Arsen's room for a spontaneous party that I left at its height at 2.00am, when they were playing guitars and singing. The ten did not know each other before and I felt a sudden wrench at leaving Amnesty. I realised I will miss the kind of closeness that it can produce in like-minded strangers. I sat looking out at the Volga with the woman from Mongolia, listening to Suzanne Vega in the background and a nightingale outside the window. We were joined by Anca, who told us about pre-revolutionary Romania. They had everything except food and heating, she said. She had icicles hanging from her radiator and used to do her cooking at 1.00am when the gas was higher. However, she reckoned that the general economic situation had been better in Romania than here.

We ate a salad made of lime leaves Denjoe had picked from the tree.

Thursday 30 May

I had an interesting travelling companion on the way home: a middle-aged woman who heads a research information centre on agriculture. We were both very tired and did a lot of sleeping, her with a bad back and me with a stiff neck. She reckons peasant farmers

can't pull the USSR out of its food crisis and that state farms are needed for some time yet. She had the kind of authority Professsor Kelina exudes, so I wasn't surprised to learn she is the head of her outfit. She also had a discreet, and I thought probably informed, interest in Amnesty. She had noticed Denjoe's badge, and asked non-intrusive questions about our information office. She saved me from a drunk who was trying to resell my train ticket, then invited me to visit her in Vladimir. I said all I knew about Vladimir was that it had ancient churches and a famous prison. She smiled quite receptively at that.

I dashed for a meeting with Oleg Malginov, the First Secretary at the Human Rights Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He had the ease about Amnesty which Soviet diplomats at the UN have, but which they largely lack here in Moscow. With some, but not too much, exaggerated familiarity he was basically asking for Amnesty materials to help them define their position on Kuwait, Cuba, China and administrative detention. We touched on Amnesty's registration and he said there was a gap in the law because there weren't many representatives of international non-governmental organisations here. "In fact, you're the only one," he said, and laughed.

From there I tottered off to the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies to get their latest plans for holding parallel activities during the September Human Rights Conference in Moscow. The outside of their building is tremendously baroque and reminded me of my fridge when it needs to defrost. The inside was like Gormenghast Hall, except for Lenin twinkling down from the carpet hanging on the wall. Their preparations seem to be very few.

Realised at 6.00pm I had neither eaten nor been to the toilet all day. When anyone here starts to say, "Marjorie, we're both women…", I know they're going to ask me how old I am. Then they ask if I have children, or if I'm married (in that order).

Friday 31 May

In my Russian lesson Misha told me how he'd collected idioms in Arkhangelsk in the far north as a student. He'd stayed with a peasant woman who slept above the stove. He'd slept on a cupboard where she kept the goats and he said the noise was deafening. After our lesson he took me to see an exhibition by Aleksey Svitich, who died early this year. He really could paint and there were some lovely things there. His widow showed us round and was wrung with grief. It had quite an effect on both of us.

From there I popped into the Bureau of Technical Administration to pick up the promised ground plan of the office premises. Had to wait twenty minutes until the woman reappeared from her shopping trip, then she treated me to a display of gratuitous rudeness. "What

are you sitting there like that for with that piece of paper in your hand?" "That file doesn't exist." "That property doesn't exist." Well, she picked the wrong one, baby. I got very coldly furious, insisted on seeing the boss, and told them Starovoytova and others are following the progress of our building application. Lo and behold, the file was found and the boss apologised to me. But they still hadn't prepared the ground plan, so I have to go back at 12.00 on Monday. They behave like you are wasting their time, but the only time they are wasting is yours. I hate acting like this, but I hate being treated like a piece of shit even more.

My spirits revived when I met Oleg Gorshenin and his friend Igor for a pizza. We had champagne and Igor asked to join Amnesty. I came home at 9.00pm and worked till 1.00am, just handling mail and writing up the week's meetings for people in London.

I realise I am getting some real friends here I can relax with: Oleg and Natalya for two, and also Misha, who was concerned that I've lost weight and look tired. He'd been waiting with some excitement for the *Moskovsky Komsomolets* article to come out, and said this morning that Radio Liberty carried a piece about our information office.

Apparently someone has thrown paint over the memorial plaque to Sakharov on Chkalov Street. The newspaper kiosk down the road has had a big picture of him in the window for two weeks.

Saturday 1 June

It's 10.00pm and I'm already in bed. There was a scene in the milk shop today. A customer thought someone had pinched her butter. From her face I don't think she was lying. The shop assistant thought she was being accused and worked herself into a state, crossing herself and throwing her cloth around. The man who delivers the milk was standing in the doorway, killing himself laughing.

After a month of hot, thundery weather, there was a heavy, cold downpour all day. I couldn't strain my cheese on the balcony so fixed a nail above the kitchen sink. A friend from Washington dropped by for a three-hour chat and I learned more from her about what is happening in the USSR than I've read or heard in Moscow.

I did May's accounts.

Sunday 2 June

Valya gave Tolya and me a lovely lunch of *okroshka* soup and meat she had bought from her hairdresser's (?). As we were all feeling celebratory we finished with cognac and waffles. They were commenting with some irony on the militant patriotism of the US people they meet, something I've noticed too – even among US Communists. Valya got onto the well-worn subject of how uncultured Soviet leaders always are. She said that during Gorbachev's honeymoon period with the West, he'd ended a press conference in

Vienna with the Russian equivalent of: “Last question please, I must rest my plates of meat.”

I seem to be going through a period of heightened awareness, because I was almost in an ecstasy back at home, looking at the sunlight on my bunch of lilacs and listening to Jacqueline du Pré playing Elgar’s *Cello Concerto*. I used to hear it as an allegory of a tragic life, but now I just hear it as extraordinarily beautiful sound. I think I also hear the sense she had of what she was playing, and how beautifully she judges it. The orchestra just seems to fall in behind her. You wouldn’t immediately think it was someone in her twenties playing.

The Quakers were good tonight, with a Tolstoyan from Latvia visiting. Sasha said his grandmother had met Tolstoy when she was a child and had written a book about it – she was a child author. Apparently Tolstoy had a collapsible walking stick and was very good at enchanting children with it.

Monday 3 June

The woman who drove me mad at the Bureau of Technical Administration was actually called Dementyeva. She wasn’t there today and the ground plan was waiting for me at 12.00, before the office formally opened. However, the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises has moved again since last Monday, and no one knew their address or had their new number.

It was that kind of a day. I was feeling a bit lousy, so spent the afternoon at home, catching up on *Izvestiya*. I see Vanessa Redgrave has been meeting the Deputy Foreign Minister about her orphans’ fund. Also Moscow Regional Soviet has opposed merging the region with Moscow city under a new mayor in the elections on 12 June. They warned Moscow not to “tempt the region with its lifestyle and the goods in its shops”. That must say volumes about the standard of living in Moscow Region.

There was a weird news programme from Alexander Nevzorov at night. He interviewed the rather wooden and ineffectual general, Makashov, who is standing as RSFSR President, and kept provoking him to promise he would use force to solve political problems. It was hard to tell if Nevzorov was making him look ridiculous or was really encouraging a hard line. He’d already broken news of the as-yet-incomplete USSR Procuracy investigation into the killings in Lithuania, exonerating Soviet soldiers, and said, “Who could have thought that *our* soldiers would have killed women and children?” Anyone in Tbilisi in 1989, I suppose. But this use of the word “ours” – which everyone, even the most unofficial people, use here – chills me. It’s like the country is sealed tight and outside there’s always “them”.

Tuesday 4 June

Today was the opening up of Irina. She came round to collect a translation and to let me read the draft article about medical workers her mother had written. They'd done a very good job, putting eloquent things into my mouth and even, thanks to Irina, a couplet from Andrey Voznessensky. Irina stayed for two hours and was very interesting and funny. She dropped out after graduating in 1983, when she saw no point in continuing with nineteenth-century Danish and English literature, particularly as she couldn't go abroad and still hasn't.

I tried to buy a bottle of cognac today. The booze shop looks like a cowshed and was packed with bodies jostling for their bottle. I couldn't buy one in the end because I didn't have an empty cognac bottle to give them. But how do you get hold of your first?

Misha invited me for an ice cream at 5.00pm. It was a super place in Oktyabrsky Square and we had bouillon with egg-filled rolls, bliny with fruit and nuts inside, and ice cream. We then came back here for whisky and on the spur of the moment went to see Fellini's *Juliette and the Spirits*, which I liked a lot. At one point Misha recited the whole of Gumilyov's poem, 'The Sixth Sense'. This only happens with Russians in my experience. The voiceover spoiled the film for him because he can't stop noticing misplaced stresses. Conversation with me must be a slow death for him.

Last night as I was lying in bed I could hear a mosquito approaching my head from different directions. It then went straight up my nose, which must have surprised it even more than me. The sound cut out and it made me laugh out loud.

Wednesday 5 June

A man wearing a hankie on his head, pyjamas and slippers walked into the milk shop today. People thought he'd come over from the hospital across the road.

Lunch at the Writers' Union where the Russian-Soviet PEN Club has its office. It's on Vorovsky Street, a very beautiful tree-lined street of old mansions. A man was sitting under the trees selling fruit juice from a full-sized fridge which he had fixed up on the pavement. The Writers' Union is in the house Tolstoy described as the Rostov mansion in *War and Peace*. I was to meet PEN Club people and Marina Rumshinskaya, to receive materials on an imprisoned Turkmenian poet. Marina and I are on a wavelength, but the other two had no idea how to publicise or help a case, never having had pre-perestroyka experience. Maybe one virtue of the last few years is that new people are getting their first taste of this kind of lobbying, and of helping prisoners. We ate in the high-beamed dining room of the House of Literary Buffs and I noticed the prices were dirt cheap and that the two PEN Club people ate and drank with gusto. A trio of heavy men

with T-shirts and ponytails came in – apparently they were from Brighton Beach. They were joined by three Soviets: thin, with dark glasses and long hair.

A quick call to the Shevardnadze Association to deliver our annual report, then home, to find that I couldn't unlock the door. Eventually a neighbour helped me get in. Things are making me uneasy again. My phone is so bad I might as well open the window and shout out of it. Last night I only worked the lock with great difficulty and this morning the landlord reckoned it had been tampered with. He said he couldn't rule out that "someone had slid inside". The word sounded awfully sinister. He is still weighing up the risks of putting some money in the bank. They seem large and immensely complicated.

Thursday 6 June

A day of work that ended at 1.00am, and a mixed day it was too. I spent the morning psyching myself up for an interview with Moscow Radio, then spent the lunchtime in utter frustration, unable to track down the journalist at the massive TV/radio complex at Ostankino, and unable to phone through to him. Eventually called it a day.

At the other end of town I became the unlikely ally of Olga Ivanovna Lavrova and the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises, as they were invaded by two totally boorish and aggressive men while I was sitting there. I saw the stone faces and defence mechanisms come into good play as they beat them off and shut the door. Olga I. L. actually has a nice face – though her secretaries don't – and looks on the point of a nervous collapse with that wretched job. For the first time they were quite helpful to me and I came away with all my documents complete, shaking the dust of the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises off my feet forever, I hope.

A tremendous thunder, lightning and hail storm then broke, which I saw by the evening had uprooted great chunks of tarmac and cobblestones from the roads and pavements. The Quakers have been given a two-year visa with journalist status to set up an office in the USSR. I went to visit two British Quakers who are running a conflict-resolution workshop here, and spoke with an interesting Ossetian journalist who was doing the course.

Past 11.00pm someone rang from Georgia to say a political prisoner on hunger strike wants to meet the Amnesty representative in Moscow.

Friday 7 June

Today I met a fresh surly face at the Privatisation Commission, where I had to take our premises papers next. My day began at 7.30am with a visit from Nikolay, dropping off a letter for the London office. I was feeling lousy, with a sore throat, a temperature, and very

tired. I realise my maternal instincts are very limited. Giving Nikolay breakfast again and having to read through his English essay, I was fighting resentment.

Then someone came round with a letter for me to translate from three gay men to a Dutch contact group. He said he had to be careful who he showed the letter to, and, here, I'm sure that is true. While he was here the sister of the Georgian prisoner rang, crying down the phone. She kept calling me Margaret Thatcher. The morning seemed surreal.

Had a disastrous afternoon trying to fax our news release on the UK to various Soviet newspapers. It was the kind of day when I should have rubbed myself out and started again. Dinner was at Mary Dejevsky's and it was a very nice evening. On the one hand an archaeologist and the new *Times* leader writer were there – very Oxbridge and very "British" – and on the other hand, John Lloyd from the *Financial Times* and Sue Jameson from the *Evening Standard*, whose backgrounds I don't know, but who seem more politicised and irreverent. We talked about Soviet racism.

Saturday 8 June

Woke feeling worse. I was very unfair to Nikolay. Today he rang to see how I am, concerned that diphtheria is going round Moscow and his neighbour has got it – symptoms: a sore throat and temperature. As he was going away for the day he then got someone else from Moscow Amnesty to call with details of my nearest polyclinic. Both very kind.

It was a lovely day which I spent mostly sleeping. Went to get my hair cut at Kropotkin Street again. Their hot water has been cut off for a month, so the women were working from a bucket, very quietly, without complaints. I wonder how many times they have to do that in a day.

Fluff from the poplar trees was swirling about all day like snow. Boys in the yard were setting it alight as it lay on the tarmac and it made a great effect. The fluff immediately vanished and small rings of flame ran along the yard, as though there was a fire underground.

Sunday 9 June

We get some very good people writing in to join Amnesty, apart from some obvious nutters. I spent the day answering twelve work letters.

The poplar fluff was streaming into the flat all day and when I lay down on the bed a great cloud of it rose around me. A weird creepy crawly has joined the flies that walk round the inside of my frying pan as I'm actually cooking, and the cockroaches that lurk under my toothbrush, amongst other places. It had a thick red neck and a black body, which it was dragging around with difficulty over my dried

dishes. It didn't look streamlined for survival somehow.

We were a small group at the Quakers, saying farewell to Margaret and John. Peter and Roswitha were visibly disturbed by their first experience of having their room gone through and someone they had trusted filching their papers. Margaret offered to get Oleg an invitation to Canada to do a Peace Studies course. When I rang later to tell him, he was audibly moved; it had always been his dream.

Monday 10 June

A hitch at the Privatisation Commission: Kotova, who promised to deal with our papers as a top priority, is on holiday and no one else knew anything about it.

I spent the day putting off writing a twenty-page article for the *Journal of Humanitarian Sciences*. Instead, I answered more letters, shopped twice, and went in to *Stolitsa* to pay for our advert. As usual Vitaly was late and as usual we ended up having a long, interesting chat – this time about single-sex education in Britain, which he found mind-blowing. I wanted to pay for the advert by cheque, which caused a stir. Two managers accompanied me to the accountants' office, where none of them wanted to touch it. They reluctantly made calls to the bank, and at last, after an hour, I was able to lodge it with them. All this time the carpet was making a strange cracking sound every time someone walked on it. I commented on it to the woman at the desk and she said in a faraway voice, "Everything's strange."

Two human rights activists from the Crimea wanted to see me. They were both short, in short-sleeved shirts, and both were called Nikolay Ivanovich. They were obviously driving each other mad after a day in Moscow, and sat on either side of me, bickering. "Get to the point, Nikolay Ivanovich"; "Nikolay Ivanovich, that's not nice." The poplar fluff was meanwhile streaming down and getting in my throat every time I tried to speak.

The RSFSR presidential elections are provoking much less buzz than the referendum did. Yeltsin seems to have got it on the posters and I got a leaflet in the mail summoning me to the pro-Yeltsin rally. However, a Ryzhkov/Gromov poster appeared in the stairway today. I watched the regular roundtable of candidates on TV tonight. It's a long and dreary format. Zhirinovsky, however, does know how to use TV, and quite dynamically. He was the only one who spoke directly to viewers, addressed interest groups – including the intelligentsia – and had answers ready in points. But his message is depressing and responds to the lowest nationalist instincts. He constantly uses that horrible word "ours". Yeltsin did not take part.

Tuesday 11 June

Got to sleep after 3.00am because of the heat and mosquitoes, then wrote my twenty-page article all morning at the kitchen table.

I went to meet Oleg Vorobyov at 3.00pm to collect the report on the UK, which he had translated. He stood on my toe and made me stand on his, otherwise we would quarrel. Apparently it's a Russian superstition. He offered good ideas for getting interpreters for our seminar in September and also asked to join Amnesty. He thinks Ryzhkov is ridiculous to be standing for President, when he's already so unpopular.

The landlord also thinks Ryzhkov is ridiculous and will vote for Yeltsin. Unlike Oleg he doesn't anticipate a Russian/USSR clash later in the year. I ventured to ask him for some ration cards for sugar and vodka, which he must be receiving for my flat. He said they needed all the sugar for jam-making and as they were doing repairs to the *dacha* they needed vodka to bribe the workmen. Why didn't I buy a bottle of cognac? I explained, and so he said he would bring me an empty bottle. Largesse!

At six I went to meet Jim Birley, who's heading the Review Committee of the World Psychiatric Association, here to assess whether the Soviets should remain in the World Psychiatric Association or leave. They've converted several rooms of the Cosmos Hotel into offices and are working frantically. I was surprised to be kissed by both him and Gary Low-Beer, but I think people are delighted to see a familiar face when they're here.

Wednesday 12 June

More flags out and another public holiday – this time a new one to celebrate the first anniversary of Russian Sovereignty. Election day too and a policeman was outside in the morning, watching the trickle of people going across the schoolyard to the polling booth. Apparently the turnout was higher than for the referendum. Voters were asked on the TV news what they wanted and they openly said, "Freedom"; "Less cruelty – more culture". I wonder if they'll get it from any of these candidates.

Father Nikon came round in the afternoon to get me to translate an English letter. He sat in his cut-away T-shirt and cross, with a Beatles tattoo on his arm, laboriously filling out an Amnesty membership form and trying to put down his feelings for Amnesty. At the end of the form he put, "with love, Nikon". He has a big scar on his left hand: the Rolling Stones tattoo which he removed when he became a priest.

I then went to meet another man who wants Amnesty's help. I didn't much like him, but I think he is a genuine case. He was full of tension and anger and talked non-stop. I had consciously to hold myself apart, otherwise I would have been swallowed by this black rage.

One of the local Amnesty group said he had an urgent letter to

give me for tomorrow's mailing to London. To lighten things up I suggested we meet in the pizzeria near him. It was quite a nice evening, but he hadn't written the letter and suggested doing it at my place on the computer. I said no. It is this which exasperates and tires me. I would rather have gone to a film or a concert than do another twelve-hour working day. Hey ho. I need a break.

Thursday 13 June

So, St Petersburg it is. First results for the presidency show that the provincial places, where Ryzhkov was expected to do well, are going over to Yeltsin. Funny – on the news the other night Ryzhkov was sensing "a new moral atmosphere" on Channel One, while Channel Two was showing a steamy French video full of corruption, violence and debauchery. Viewers' phone calls flooded in and the newsreader apologised for Gostelradio.

Nikolay was round with his letter at 8.00am. I told him I was happy to act as his courier to London, but only when his letters were ready in future. He was peeved.

I then went to meet the Head of the Non-Governmental Organisations' Section at the huge Ministry of Foreign Affairs building at Smolenskaya-Sennaya Square. It used to be called "Dom Gromyko" – "Gromyko's House". When I went in the policeman clapped his hands and a young man in a checked jacket appeared across the hall to take me upstairs. He was Pavel Karpov, assistant to Alexander Gorelik, and both were intelligent and quiet. They were discussing the possibilities for registering Amnesty, but I think just wanted the opportunity to size up the beast. At the end Gorelik slipped in, "and naturally you are researching violations here…", and I explained not, quite firmly.

Another visit to the WPA Review Committee in the Cosmos Hotel. Svetlana Polubinskaya hallooed me in the lobby and was very funny talking about the progress of the draft Law on Psychiatry. I said she should write a play about it. She said she would write a mystery story: why someone official could look her in the eye and say some instructions did not exist, while she'd had copies of them in her bag for months. I like her. One of the Americans there asked me how long I'd been at Amnesty, because my English was really very good. I think she was a bit confused.

I had a nice impromptu evening at the Teplitskys'. They said the floor of Chyromushinsky Market was a sea of tomatoes, strawberries and cherries today. Taxi drivers from Kursk station had come to claim their pay-off and roughed up the stalls.

This afternoon a drunkish man tried to kick me in the street. I got out of his way, then watched him. He avoided a man, then bore straight onto the next woman, who ran away frightened. My first

thought was, *That's very Western behaviour*. I wonder why I should think that? Except that you do see a generalised hostility to women in films and street gangs there, that you don't see here.

Friday 14 June

After an immensely tiring and boring day stuffing envelopes, I asked Irina what she thought of the book I'd lent her about a woman who was cured of cancer by diet therapy. She said such an enormous will to live was a little bit difficult for a Soviet person to understand.

Saturday 15 June

A day I reclaimed for myself and not a moment too soon. It was another day of cold driving rain, interspersed with hot bright stretches and blue skies. I really enjoyed the morning, listening to Grace Jones and reading the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*. I'd no idea the Queen had been to the USA or that Angus Wilson and Coral Browne had died.

I went into town, bought a book and had some photos taken at the Instant Photo shop – instant meaning ready by Monday lunchtime. You go into a backroom hung with posters of Alla Pugacheva and nymphs with wet clinging T-shirts, and a middle-aged woman with an apron and wooden camera tripod sizes you up and shifts the tripod around depending what size photo you want. She stomped up to me and silently yanked my head around until it was straight.

The hefty cashier in the milk shop was sitting in her vest, applying make-up into her compact. A drunk had missed the bench outside my back window and was lying flat on his back on the ground with his arms outstretched. The local grocery shop, the size of the average Spar, has been totally empty for the first five months of my stay here. Now they've closed off most of it and opened two stalls selling cigarettes, sausage and cake – less than you'd see at an average boy scout sale. The woman rummages in a big cardboard box to get you your change.

I had dinner at Hella and Siffra's and we watched a video of John Mortimer's *Summer's Lease*. They said I look exhausted, but they do too. They intend to cut short their three-year contract unless they begin to enjoy life here more. I find things are always interesting, but I am not enjoying myself either. Like me, Siffra has started smoking. She had been to Novokuznetsk, where not only has the hot water stopped, but public transport too, so people are walking everywhere. If that happens in Moscow I really will give up.

Sunday 16 June

There was a pool of blood where the drunk lay yesterday. At about 10.00am a troupe of people singing to an accordion went through the courtyard, the men in wigs and skirts and women in aprons. People were sitting out with their carpets draped over the

children's climbing frames. A man stripped to the waist was silently swinging over and over on the parallel bars outside my window.

I shopped in the Danilov Market and bought a chicken, cheese, cherries, strawberries and herbs.

I had the chance to do some thinking today and achieved some peace of mind. It is very enjoyable and therapeutic to sound off as I did last night with Hella and Siffra, but it is also easy to overwhelm yourself with the enormous odds. I think I will feel better if I only think about the things which present themselves each day, and include my own enjoyment in that. Things are basically moving in the right direction and each day tends to be very different and unpredictable. Unlike journalists here, I think, I do have a defined purpose and there is satisfaction in unravelling the whole complicated issue. I should also remember that the responsibility is not all mine, although that is harder to believe.

Life here is like an elaborate Outward Bound course, with half the participants asking me to help them. I've never liked Outward Bound courses, but for that reason I should try to relax more about it. For the people who live here, it is deadly serious.

Monday 17 June

I went back on the premises trail. Starovoytova had done her stuff and an "order" was waiting for me at the Privatisation Commission. I queued for ninety minutes to pick it up. We were all getting very tense as the lunch hour approached and the office would shut up shop. I just made it in, and a charming woman with a nice smile helped me fill in the form. It made an immense difference.

I thought this was basically the last step in our search, but discovered I have to get three official stamps on the paper from three different authorities in different parts of Moscow, all with their different opening hours. One is a police station near me that has to testify that 22 Herzen Street is not an official monument. Everyone knows it is not an official monument, but they have to certify it, probably at some cost to Amnesty. The next thing will be that I have to find a dragon's tooth.

Off I set for the first stop: my favourite place – the Bureau of Technical Administration. I met a nice man who was trying to register his firm and we stood in the doorway for fifteen minutes until six women had finished discussing their office dinner. When I was finally seen, it turned out I had filled in one of the boxes meant for them – correctly, but in my writing, not theirs. Two of them discussed what to do and decided I would have to come back another day with a new form. I said I couldn't do that, and so they told me to come back next week. I said it was urgent, and they began a shouted conversation between two rooms: "Oh, it's *urgent*… everyone's living at top speed."

(!!) Everyone might be trying to live at top speed… I reckon this is what's happened to the milk supplies – someone filled the form out wrong.

My day had a very interesting end. I went to visit Nina Petrovna Lisovskaya, a woman I've spoken to on the phone for six months, but never met. She has been trying to rescue a computer from customs for an ex-prisoner, so far without success. She's seventy-four, the first single woman I've met, and very dry. After I'd been there five minutes, she told me to say thank you at the end of the evening and not at every step. She was a biochemist until she retired, and has tried her hand at journalism, but said that as someone brought up in the Stalin era, she finds she does not have a personal opinion – an inner censor is always at work. I hope I see more of her.

With Natasha and Rachael I saw Kira Muratova's film *The Asthenic Syndrome*, which was excellent. It's in two parts. The first shows a woman in her late thirties whose husband is suddenly killed. Her grief totally alienates her from her surroundings. She rejects her friends, resigns from her job; when someone bumps into her in the street, she belts someone else; she picks someone up, then when she realises it's not her husband, she throws him out. She can't stand anyone and she's desperate.

The second part switches to Soviet life and shows everyone zombified on the metro, then dashing and fighting their way out; the bizarre fights and rows in shops and on the street; the constant brimming over of talk, talk, talk and aggression. The main character is a teacher who is always falling asleep, because he can't take his surroundings. By analogy, it is as though the whole of Soviet society is disorientated and feeling-less, because of some past grief. What was heartening and impressive was that a Soviet filmmaker and Soviet actors could see everyday life so vividly.

You would think they might be inured to it. What was disheartening was that the main character just can't stand it anymore and is slumped asleep at the end.

An encouraging late-night call from Tolya. Off his own initiative he has got the firm in to measure our security door today, and it will be fixed by the end of the week. Just what I was wanting.

Tuesday 18 June

It has happened: the hot water went off this morning.

I met Tolya in the morning to give him money for the door, then had two interesting interviews. The first was with Valery Rudnev in the offices of *Izvestiya*, although he works for the RSFSR Supreme Court journal *Soviet Justice*. He was interested in the death penalty and wants to run a monthly Amnesty column on anything we want. Excellent.

From them I went to *New Times*, where Lev Yelin whipped out his tape recorder and our chat became an interview. What interested him more than anything was that I am living here on roubles, not hard currency. He was astonished and stopped the tape recorder. He said he could imagine going to live in the jungle in Colombia, but not living on roubles in the USSR. Apparently *New Times* now has a financial department which is selling iron ore and timber in order to finance the paper. He said the people in it look as though they wear guns under their jackets. The staff had been surprised to see a fax in which their financial department was selling a submarine, "whisky type" to the USA.

Wednesday 19 June

Had a lousy night's sleep with the heat and the mosquitoes, and woke up in the depths of depression. Rachael came round with a hangover to take the mail for London. She was wondering how much bad temper and shouting went into Kira Muratova's film about bad temper and shouting. That's a point.

It was sweltering hot all day. I bought my first milk for ten days. The woman in the vest was sitting drinking juice out of a jam jar – there is a great shortage of glasses. On the bus there was a sign saying, "There are no bus tickets and there will be none!!!" so no one could pay for their ride. There is a great paper shortage. This really is a crappy, crappy system. You'd think the country had no resources or was at war – but it's not. The No. 1 trolleys were doing lightning strikes all day, so everyone was fit to burst by the time they got on one. A woman wanted to open the skylight and another one said, "You need a man." "Who needs men?" the first one asked, shoving the skylight open with her umbrella. "All they do is drink and smoke." "And women don't?" someone said, and a rumbling row broke out. Looking round at everyone I felt like screaming.

I spent the day collecting official stamps on my piece of paper. First to the Bureau of Technical Administration where a sweet, mousey woman gave it to me with a smile. Then I travelled to the Administration of Architectural Monuments. They were not open but I took a chance and had some luck. They are in an old merchant's house in a courtyard of Pyatnitsky Street, and have a lovely Art Nouveau staircase. I was admiring it to a young man and he spontaneously took me through all the three offices where I needed to go, each time to a barrage of cries and objections. He finally broke into a drawer, took out a stamp and stamped my paper there and then. I said that his work was very "*operativno*" – meaning efficient – but he heard me say "*protivno*" – revolting – and he said yes.

One of the rooms, I noticed, was full of flowers and even strewn with packets of roses that had not yet been put in their vases.

Presumably they were bribes from people wanting their papers stamped quickly. At the Privatisation Commission earlier this week, the Aeroflot woman in front of me had been hurriedly handing out calendars. I went back there, but my luck didn't hold. While I was standing waiting for the boss to appear, I met two funny men from the International Federation of Artists, who were planning to start a car-repair division under it (?). They were convinced I wanted to start a hairdresser's. Well, stands to reason – I'm a woman.

Oleg and Father Nikon came round and Nikon cooked us dinner. I need company – it does me good. At night I found my telephone wasn't working and my electronic mail link has been cut off.

Thursday 20 June

At the Privatisation Commission today we all seemed to be the "go-getters" who had made it to the last lap. There was a kind of post-Sahara rally atmosphere, with people reminiscing about difficult parts of the race. "Here they ask you to fill out the form from left to right, but the Bureau of Technical Administration asks you to do it from right to left" etc. There was an extraordinarily bossy woman queuing, who kept calling out, "Comrade in the glasses, who's in front of you?" I got to see my nice woman again, and the final document will be ready next Thursday. So we've got by, without being registered, having no bank account, no tax certification and no office seal of our own. A miracle!

I spent one hour queuing there, twenty minutes queuing for a Pepsi in the street and another hour queuing at the post office to send a money transfer to the Privatisation Commission for our "order". Came home and fell asleep, because last night had been another broken night with heat and mosquitoes. I had also been woken at 3.00am by a deafening grinding and roar, which I've only heard before when a tank went down the road in London. Here it lasted for about five minutes.

It was 33 degrees today and again there was a massive storm in the afternoon.

Friday 21 June

Another thundery, headachey day. I got my air tickets for home, but though I kept phoning the Foreign Ministry, I couldn't get through to sort out my visa.

Otherwise it was a social day. I met the man with black rage again, who seems to have calmed down considerably, said some very touching words at the end and kissed my hand. I then met a young German student who is interested in Amnesty. She's studying in Vilnius and says Lithuania is just as bureaucratic as Moscow and just as exhausting. Its nationalism, she says, is also very "Soviet".

Lunch with Valya, which was nice as usual. She said she was

enjoying life, going to tennis lessons and discussing ground strokes and the possibility of a military coup. This last because the USSR Supreme Soviet has voted to take away powers from Gorbachev and give them to Prime Minister Pavlov. However, by the end of the day Gorbachev appeared to have reasserted his position.

I met up with Ruslan, who had brought two bottles of beer and a round of cheese, so we sat on a bench and consumed them. He said this was Russian exotica: drinking from a dirty bottle, on a dirty bench, eating cheese with dirty fingers. He is just 10 roubles above the poverty line. He has no hot water, his gas has been cut off and he's afraid his lighting will be next. Like many people who are really poor he is always immaculately turned out. While we were sitting there a dog jumped up and muddied his only pair of trousers.

He's thirty-three and has had no real life. He says things are beginning to get to him and if someone bumps into him in the metro he's mentally unleashing a torrent of abuse. I said I was too. He'd been baptised a Catholic in camp. I asked if they'd let a priest in and he said no, they were already doing sentences in the camp. This was 1988.

From there I went with heavy heart to dinner with the representative of the Georgian National Congress in Moscow. We ate at the Russky Traktir, a strange place with neon lighting in the tables so you couldn't actually see the food on your plate. The floor show included two naked women dancing with snakes and a young singer with a doleful repertoire. George paid 150 roubles in different tips to people (although we still didn't get coffee) and was on "ty" terms with the waiter and on winking terms with just about everyone else. I had no say in what I ate; he'd ordered everything in advance, including two bottles of champagne. I watched like a hawk which direction his toasts were taking and didn't enjoy the evening at all. One funny thing: he said his father was a physicist and mountain climber. For services to physics he was given permission to jump the queue to climb Everest. That amused me highly.

Today my phone was working but my toilet was not. The landlord was at his most acquisitive worst, and wants to take away the pans, chairs and fridge. I think I will ask for a reduction in rent.

Saturday 22 June

I spent nine hours working on my article about the death penalty, and I noticed I was really involved in it and mentally wanting to shake the reader by the lapels. It seems I've reached some sort of level of Soviet reality where I am intensely aware of the irrationality and cruelty of life here. Ordinary people are the victims of it and also a part of it. It is very hard to sort out your feelings about things here. But the death penalty is quite a good issue to try to do so.

Irina came round, bringing me the bad translation which she had reworked very well. She has immensely good brains and I admire the reasons why she dropped out. She brought me a coffee-maker.

Tolya rang and has managed to fit our security door.

Sunday 23 June

A guy on the World Service financial programme was blithely talking about introducing a credit card system into the USSR. Sounded great – but who's going to put their money in the bank when their 50- and 100-rouble notes get cancelled overnight and they can only draw out hard currency if they've already got an exit visa in their hands (and then only $500)?

Tolya came round with roses and cake to discuss building plans while I'm away. I finished my article then took it round to Tanya Ilina's on Kutuzovsky Prospekt. She gave me tea and we had a nice chat. She lived in Vietnam for five years and was there for the fall of Saigon. She said life was hell when she was there but she finds herself missing the atmosphere and people's reactions. She said the Vietnamese would transport a whole family on a bike and the woman on the back would be sewing and swinging her foot. Perfect balance. She would like to interview Galina Starovoytova for the *Journal of Humanitarian Sciences*, but says she is so responsive to changing events and has such defined reactions that any interview would be out of date before the journal was published. Starovoytova does seem to be someone who is evolving all the time and has not yet reached her final level. Very interesting altogether.

From there I cabbed to the Quakes. Riding around Moscow in a beat-up car with music on the tape deck is really one of my pleasures in life. Tatyana said a Russian Orthodox prayer for travellers for me. She'd been looking through family relics and had just found for the first time a paper showing her father had died in a camp, building the Belomor canal. She was very moved and disturbed.

New joke today about the Baltics. "Fido!" (No reply). "Fido!" (No reply). "Fidos!" – "Woofs!"

Monday 24 June

I left Moscow in brilliant fresh sunshine. The airport runway was forcing back the summer forest, but barely. On the flight I proofed the Russian translation of Amnesty's report on unfair trials in the UK. And so, home…

JULY–OCTOBER 1991

Saturday 20 July

I've just been watching the gymnastics competition from the Luzhniki Stadium. One girl was doing floor exercises with a ball, threw it up in the air, did three somersaults and caught it perfectly on the *back* of her neck. The commentator, though, was intensely critical throughout. Are these the same people who leave wires sticking out of every wall and pipes all over the road? It's hard to believe.

I flew back four days ago with someone from the BBC, who introduced me to brandy and Drambuie cocktails. Arrived in high spirits and have stayed that way ever since. The weather is fantastic – hot and breezy – and the sultriness of June has gone. It's also an immensely exciting time to be back. The Russian Parliament had gone to six rounds, trying to vote a new chair, now Yeltsin has gone, and unable to break a stalemate between Khasbulatov and Baburin, the "Communist Party's candidate". Eventually they threw up fourteen new candidates for the post, which didn't help. On my first night I happened to switch on the TV to see Galina Starovoytova in full flood, talking six miles to the minute, withdrawing her candidacy in favour of Khasbulatov. The whole issue has been shelved until the next session of Parliament in September. Some people fear the parliamentary democrats are going to throw it all away the way they did in February/March 1917, but to me they seem smarter than that.

The different perceptions between home and abroad are very interesting though. I aired my theory that Shevardnadze's departure from the Communist Party right before the Group of 7 meeting looked like a part of official Soviet foreign policy, and that Gorbachev will probably have to join him if he wants to be USSR President again after the next elections. Unlike the man from the BBC, no one thinks it terribly likely or at all interesting.

It has also been the Moscow Film Festival and for someone who likes watching films with a Soviet audience, it's all been really enjoyable. The Teplitskys wangled me free tickets to *Europa Europa*, *Dillinger is Dead*, *The Garden* and, tomorrow, *The Decameron*. To my surprise *The Garden*, which has a gay theme, got an award and was well written up in *Izvestiya*. It seemed rather pretentious to me.

The real difference this time though has been coming back to friends which I didn't have three months ago. I have to find a hall where Amnesty can hold a seminar in September, during the CSCE human rights conference. Natalya immediately agreed to contact the Moscow College of Advocates, Misha is contacting Moscow University, Viktor is contacting Moscow City Soviet, and Natasha and Galya are

approaching the State Cinema organisation. I think something will work out.

My own situation is shakier than ever before, however, as I was given a visa only for a month this time, so should leave on 15 August. In my absence too, the Privatisation Commission refused to give us our "order" unless we are registered. I can't judge if that's serious; if it is, bang go our hopes of opening the office by autumn. Although these things drove me frantic earlier in the year I can't get bothered about them now. That's probably when they suddenly throw you out.

Nothwithstanding, Tolya and I went round 22 Herzen Street on Thursday, taking measurements and planning wiring and sockets, ready for the builders to start repairs. We were joined by Natasha, an Amnesty sympathiser from the House of Architects, who had some good professional advice. She and Tolya took an immediate dislike to each other. I realise this will be quite an exercise in management.

Some nice personal updates. Irina was round to collect the Brodsky book I had bought her. She said she'd held her last political post when she was ten, when she was made head of her Pioneer brigade. After that she decided something was not quite right with the way things were. As language students in the early 1980s they were always being groomed as potential military interpreters. They had to do one day's military training *a week* (!) and were groomed in how to withstand interrogation by the enemy.

Have fitted a mosquito net and had my best sleeps for ages.

Sunday 21 July

More gorgeous weather. At weekends the streets are beautifully quiet in the early mornings, and today there was a smell of kebabs. Tonight someone was playing an accordion in the yard.

Irina and I went to the gymnastics competition at the Luzhniki Stadium and had to stand up nine times for the Ukrainian national anthem as they walked off with the prizes. All these young girls of 9–15 are professionals, constantly being trained at throwing ribbons, sticks and balls during their floor exercises. They were brilliant, but they all left the arena looking totally downhearted and you wondered if it was all worth it.

Irina hadn't been in the stadium since she worked there as an official interpreter in the Moscow Olympics. They'd been trained in how to handle difficult questions like, "Why is there no shampoo in Moscow?", but she said all the foreign journalists had been too busy to ask these "Soviet questions". It was a heatwave, but she was given the task of rooting out people in shorts and telling them they couldn't come into the stadium. She's got a big brain and not enough stimulus, so remembers and ruminates on everything, e.g. "Was Margaret Thatcher carrying *wild* flowers when she met Gorbachev in London?"

or “Was Jim Morrison’s father an admiral?”

On the spur of the moment we got the boat back up river into town. The view from the boat was like the East River when you sail round Manhattan. The gymnastics and the river trip cost about 5p altogether. However, Irina earns less than £5 a month.

Monday 22 July

Sixty-three letters were waiting for me when I got back this time, so interest in Amnesty is growing. Today Misha and I went to see the Dean of the Journalism Faculty at Moscow University to ask if Amnesty can use their hall for our seminar. He was elderly and sat surrounded by pillars of books on every table and chair, all of them apparently new. He kissed my hand and agreed before I’d even finished asking. Apparently he was an old friend of Sean MacBride’s and also opposes the death penalty, quite vehemently, as I discovered. So, we’re all set.

I queued for one and three quarter hours to buy a ticket for Leningrad this weekend. In the middle there was a ten-minute “technological break”, after which the woman came back with her mouth full of biscuit. I also waited half an hour at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss my visa, as requested, but the guy didn’t show up.

At night had a great dinner at the Teplitskys’. They all had a flaming row about democracy.

Tuesday 23 July

Today I met a very nice man, Viktor Leontiev, given two years’ correctional tasks in Kazakhstan for defaming Gorbachev. He’d sold a calendar showing Gorbachev swathed like a cherub and listing dates of the Tbilisi massacre, the invasion of Soviet troops in Baku etc. Apparently they’re on sale in other places but no one has been prosecuted.

In the afternoon I tried to make contact with a Mr Larichev in the Moscow Department of Justice, to discuss our premises. The woman who gave me his name yesterday told me today that he doesn’t exist and put the phone down on me. I called again and we carried on talking as though nothing had happened. It’s like tiptoeing through outbreaks of lunacy. At 7.30pm I met Rumyantsev, the young and handsome Second Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to discuss my visa. They’re all working late with Summit fever for next week. Rumyantsev has to handle Barbara Bush and Raisa Gorbacheva’s programme.

Saw Pasolini’s *The Decameron* with Misha, Natasha and Galya, which was lovely. The day ended with very nice Soviet jazz on TV.

Wednesday 24 July

Nina Petrovna, the old lady I liked so much, has had an infarkt

and is in intensive care. I was supposed to see her today, but a neighbour rang to tell me.

Today I met Vladimir Alimov, the head of the Fund for the Individual, who's doing a six-hour TV slot about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Human Rights Day in December and wants Amnesty to take part. He described himself to me over the phone as "rather good-looking", but I couldn't make him out at all. His organisation is non-governmental – he says he was a worker for ten years – but he obviously has high support in the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He also didn't seem to want to let me go, so we tramped all over looking for a cup of coffee, without success, and he finally walked me all the way home.

Just in time to meet my landlord, with whom I had the most human conversation I've ever had. He was wrecked after a ten-day interpreting trip in the UK and Europe. They'd sailed to London on a big sea in a small boat over five days and the minute they arrived he'd had to translate for MPs, businessmen and the BBC, although he was up to the eyeballs with sea sickness tablets. It was interesting to hear his views on London, where he'd got photographed with Margaret Thatcher's statue in Madame Tussaud's but managed to see no other sights. He was aware of being followed in London, in particular by two rockers, who popped up wherever he went. It amused me to think of maybe two Oxford Firsts in Russian donning the gear.

In the evening I went to "Memorial" to a meeting of the local abolitionist group there. I wanted to meet the RSFSR Deputy, Kononov, who'd written a good article on the death penalty. I realise there are two rhetorical styles in Russian meetings. In one you talk loudly and override everyone else until you've finished your sentence. In the other you sit silent while everyone burbles and then speak with dramatic quietness, so you sound like the still small voice of God. This used to deceive me, but now I realise it can be just as pompous and silly as what everyone else is saying.

Thursday 25 July

Quite a lot of my mail is apparently going missing, so I met up with yet another person who'd sent stuff back in June which I never got. Then off to Tanya's to deliver a translation. She was charming company as usual and told me how, when Andropov was a plain old member of the Communist Party Central Committee, she used to see him in the bread shop with his string bag. To my surprise the *Journal of Humanitarian Sciences* had liked my article on the death penalty, and apparently genuinely so. A lawyer from the Ministry of Internal Affairs wants the right to reply.

As it was heavy rain I took a cab, with a woman driver. She said there were very few of them and they were burying one tomorrow,

who got murdered. They work twelve-hour shifts on alternate days.

Near midnight Oleg came round in a flap. He'd lent me the statute of Boris Nazarov's Information Centre on Human Rights to read, but found out he had to translate it by tomorrow afternoon. The statute is very like ours, and I wonder if that's significant.

In the morning, oddly enough, I bumped into the "rather good-looking" Vladimir Alimov, and he said, "The ways of God are unfathomable."

Thursday 1 August

I'm just back from *Desert Hearts* with Nikolay. As we rode the empty trolley bus home I waved at someone standing out on his balcony enjoying the night air. Nikolay said, "Goodness, he might have had a rifle!" Unduly pessimistic, even for him.

Friday 2 August

This has been a fantastic week. I've had a marvellous time since I got back from London, and more fun these two weeks than in the last three months put together.

The week began with a long weekend in Leningrad with Lyuda and Viktor. More lazy breakfasts with the cognac bottle. They took me up to the *dacha* to see Lyuda's intimidating mum and dad, and we swam in the lake, I gathered mushrooms for the first time, at long last, and we had a whacking great meal.

Lyuda and I also walked around Leningrad, which is now looking quite a bit more prosperous. People are better dressed than in Moscow and we passed a row of six nice clean cooperative cafés, all doing good business. Viktor also took me to a joint venture publishing firm – very impressive desktop publishing – who might take on our newsletter.

We also looked round the waxwork exhibit at the Museum of the Revolution, called "Reform or Terror?" It was basically a gruesome catalogue of every political figure who's been killed or bumped off since 1800, but the commentary was interesting and very definitely in favour of reform over revolution. Stolypin was the hero of the hour; Lenin had an ugly snarl. In the room of Influential Thinkers they had Sakharov next to Marx, Plekhanov and Dostoyevsky. Someone had laid flowers at Sakharov's feet.

On Saturday night Lyuda and I saw Genet's *The Maids*, all played by men from Konstantin Raykin's Moscow Company. It was beautifully done – very erotic and anguished – and it was hard to believe these were Soviet performers in front of a, very appreciative, Leningrad audience. There's something peculiar in the way that mainstream audiences flock to gay art, even when they can't tolerate gay life. There was a gay film festival in Moscow later this week and Vitaly Yerenkov of *Stolitsa* made the same point to me. He said it was

the equivalent of holding a Mafia festival in the centre of Moscow.

On Tuesday night Irina took me to a chamber music concert at the stately home near her flat. Fantastic sunset over the lake and parkland as we walked home. She showed me her sweetpeas and lobelia and as we couldn't find a torch we used candles.

On the work front, Tolya has got the workmen starting on Monday. I went to the USSR Foreign Ministry to brief them on all our endeavours for the CSCE human rights conference in September, and revisited the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies to put them in the picture. The documents have also arrived from London for me to start the process of registering Amnesty.

Saturday 3 August

A sweltering hot day. I saw a new leafy part of Moscow when I went to DHL to pick up a parcel. They work from a small basement, all nicely plastered and whitewashed, the way I would like our office to be. Later I popped to Father Nikon's. He was excited about an article he was writing about "paganism", which was actually very interesting. We sat in his kitchen as the light faded, drinking balsam in our tea, and I translated the John Lennon tape I'd brought him. He was weepy listening to 'Imagine' and so was I. The balsam tea brought us both out in a sweat.

I've been having some curious dreams lately. Last Tuesday I dreamt of a constellation of three stars on the top left of a screen – the Leo constellation – but I knew there was something beyond them to the top right. In the morning I switched on the radio and heard that scientists had discovered a new constellation.

Sunday 4 August

In the morning I met Alexander from the Latvian Amnesty group. The two friends with him were Moscow journalists specialising in rock music, which they say has gone underground again in the USSR. The sound of the hour is reggae and the best reggae groups are in Kaliningrad, oddly enough, where they play reggae with Baltic and German motifs. Hard to imagine. Alexander said it was "reggae with beer glasses". As I left them I bumped into the "rather good-looking" Vladimir Alimov *again*. The ways of God seem to be getting more unfathomable by the hour.

After a domestic day Hella and Siffra took me to a satirical cabaret at the "Sovremennik" by the Spartakovsky company. It was very lively and entertaining and, unlike British equivalents, it seemed unforced and had no reference to TV, or to TV personalities, themes or adverts. The whole company stood in the dark, wearing white gloves under purple luminous lighting, and slowly performed Japanese martial arts to the sound of disco music. There was no point to it, but it was inventive and it worked.

We had dinner and they told me that the USA-USSR Summit had been a totally US event. Journalists were invited to briefings with footage from CNN, free Coke, and all in English. Soviet journalists were desperate. Bush seemed reluctant to promise another summit, presumably because he doesn't know who his counterpart will be, they said.

Monday 5 August

Knocked myself out today racing all over Moscow. Had a morning interview with Sergey Maslov at *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (circulation: 17 million), which lasted *three* hours and delved into all sorts of philosophical points like: Is it possible to speculate on conscience? Doesn't free exit jeopardise the economic wealth of a country and people's social and economic rights in it? etc. All very interesting, but exhausting, especially in Russian.

From there I dashed to the International Post Office to drop off translations – the equivalent of riding from Finchley to Morden – then up to Krasnye Vorota to meet Misha and get the invitations to Amnesty's September seminar photocopied. One hundred for 30 roubles, i.e. about 75p. From there to Irina's to take her Bhagwati's speech on the death penalty to translate – the equivalent of trekking from Leytonstone to Guildford. I sat in a heap for about three hours, but we had an interesting talk. It was a boiling hot day, but she had just finished knitting a thick woollen jumper, so was wearing it.

Tuesday 6 August

The day ended with a massive minor chord – my first since I've been back this time. I went up to Natalya's legal consultancy, where I thought we would just draft an application form to register with Moscow City Justice Department. However, she knows the law on registration much better than I do and pointed out that we are ineligible to register with the city as long as we have "International" in our title. Unless we have ten official representatives over here – and we don't – we are also ineligible to register with the Russian or the USSR authorities. We called the Non-Government Organisations' Section of the USSR Foreign Ministry to check, and learned that, contrary to their earlier friendly noises, they have made no arrangements to support our application, nor are they planning to.

I began to have very dark thoughts about official motives in the whole of this experiment and to despair of finding a way out. Although lots of my mail is going missing, a disturbing anonymous letter still managed to get through, wishing me dead.

Ivan Polozkov resigned from the leadership of the Russian Communist Party today. They said he'd let morale slide.

Wednesday 7 August

A very chaotic morning. A visit from Penal Reform International,

then Tolya came to report on the building works: the workers are stripping the plaster and have taken out the old door frames. As he was talking two men suddenly came to the door wearing hats made out of newspaper and said they were plumbers. Something in my flat is leaking down into the neighbours' below. They removed the kitchen tap and heaved all sorts of garbage out of the bathroom cupboard onto the hall floor, then said they would come back tomorrow. I couldn't get over it! For some chivalrous reason Tolya said he would come back tomorrow and supervise them. I now have no hot water or toilet.

After hours on the computer I had a maddening afternoon. I went to the Foreign Ministry Information Department to collect the visa extension they had promised, but there was no sign of it, and Rumyantsev was uncontactable. I then roamed around Komsomolskaya station in hot, thundery weather, trying to find where I could buy a ticket for Riga and the Amnesty meeting next week. There are seven main buildings there and every desk I went to said, "It's in the other building across the square." *Which* other building? Nothing was signposted, and there seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the ticket distribution. Eventually got a ticket after queuing two hours.

I then went to Viktor's birthday party. His mother loves me somehow – I feel she hangs on me when we meet or say goodbye. Viktor's the only Russian I know who smiles broadly and for no immediate reason. It's nice, and not totally in character, because he often looks quite tortured. Viktor is in charge of organising the first Knesset visit to the USSR/Russia this autumn. He says he's been drafting Yeltsin's letters to the Israelis, then drafting the replies from the Israeli Consulate to Yeltsin. A very Soviet scenario: presidential assistant in his impoverished flat, wringing with damp and pigeons.

Shevardnadze wrote today, inviting concrete proposals for cooperation from Amnesty.

Thursday 8 August

The men with newspaper hats came and mended the toilet, silently. Tolya sat in and even cleaned the bathroom floor afterwards. We have written our application form to get a phone reinstalled in the Herzen Street office. I've also sent out invitations to our September seminar to people in the provinces who are interested in abolishing the death penalty.

At lunch I went for a steam bath with Irina and, dripping with sweat, we discussed the finer points of Justice Bhagwati's speech. The bathhouse is in an old factory district and you can buy bunches of oak twigs outside to beat yourself with, though we didn't. Inside it was like stepping into limbo, with all these women sitting silently on steps and benches in the semi-gloom, apparently waiting for something. It

was even more like limbo when they started beating each other with these twigs. Eventually we became part of a chummy, chubby team that kept going in together. Everyone was wearing shoes and a hat, and some people were carrying handbags, so it looked as though they were going for the bus but had forgotten to put their clothes on. Irina was great fun to be with. I asked her afterwards if she felt purified and she said in English, "I'm fully clear" – George Fox's last words, which she must have picked up from the Quaker article I lent her.

My landlord came round to ask me again about cheques and credit cards. I sympathise with him. He's totally able to work the complex system here, but is literally an innocent abroad. At six had two big gin and tonics at the Metropol hotel with the Portuguese Ambassador – gorgeous. His hot water has been cut off too, but he has a reserve supply and so invited me to come and wash my hair there. Nice man. He's heading the Portuguese delegation to the CSCE conference. I gave him our background paper and the annual report.

Friday 9 August

I was unable to get the BBC this morning, but learned from Radio Moscow that John McCarthy must have been released.

I had my last Russian lesson with Misha today. His wife is coming back from Yugoslavia tomorrow. I brought him flowers and he opened the door in his apron, as is our wont, and we had another good lesson. I felt prematurely nostalgic about finishing our classes; he really is the most accomplished teacher I've had and, as is not always the case with conversation teachers, we both like talking to each other. He has great tact about what is right and what is wrong behaviour and is very kind. Today he told me about all his troubles in getting a job as a Jew. Although he is not at all militant about it, he says at some point it broke his spirit. He thinks de-Partyising the workplace will be a great step forward. In Leningrad Lyuda told me about all the pressure she is under to accept bribes for exam results and how the system works. The employment system sounds designed for waste, but in a different way ours seems to be too.

In the afternoon I delivered Amnesty's visa applications for the September seminar to the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies, then connected up with Natalya, who had found out all the legal niceties involved in registering as a commercial company. Apparently it is not for us. Oleg Gorshenin came round looking thin and exhausted. After dealing with prisoners so much I used to regard emigrating as a bit of a soft optional extra, but my views have changed since I've been here. I worry about the office, but that's nothing to what faces him and others. Their whole life here slips down the tubes as they try to surmount endless, incalculable obstacles to leave, and they have no idea what faces them next. I really felt for him. Fed him – his first

meal in over two days.

The courier I sent to London on Monday still has not arrived. I wonder if they get intercepted too.

Saturday 10 August

I've enjoyed today very much. I went to get Viktor's advice about registering Amnesty with the Russian government. His mother answered the door. Viktor was asleep, so I had a plate of potatoes and a glass of champagne they'd saved for me from last night. There were seven people in the flat, including one woman who was just standing in the hall and two who continually carried boxes out of a room to a car outside. I've no idea who anyone was, but their life carried on regardless. I went to read the paper, but also fell asleep, and so Viktor and I woke up two hours later on divans at opposite ends of the room and discussed Amnesty's registration. As usual his advice was good and to the point. Apparently he had accidentally taken one of his mother's tablets and was feeling comatose. He said someone had brought him sugar as a birthday present and wondered if next year he'd get bread.

Then I met Ruslan and we drank a beer in the Kremlin Gardens. His foreign passport expires at the end of August and he is pitting all his wits to use the human rights conference in September as a lever to get permission finally to leave. He seems in better nick than Oleg, but is also not eating anything.

A journalist friend called to say he's cutting short his stay in Moscow because of threats he is receiving. Interesting. When I got home tonight a woman in the courtyard, whom I'd never seen before, told me the DHL van had called with a box, but "I told them you always get back late."

Sunday 11 August

The weather has suddenly become much cooler and we've had some thunderstorms. People here look on August as the start of autumn, unfortunately. However, it doesn't seem to dampen down the wildlife. I'm sitting here at the kitchen table with an ant on my arm, flies copulating on the table, mosquitoes in the air and a cockroach crawling over the cooker.

It was my birthday and I had nice calls from home and from a trickle of ex-prisoners here. Irina came round to bring the Bhagwati translation and also to have lunch. My efforts to make a nice meal were pretty dismal, for lack of plates, an oven and half the ingredients.

A very nice birthday call from Misha. Here's a big difference from the UK: I had assumed when his wife came back they would rather shut out the world, but they were ringing to invite me round next week. Lovely.

Monday 12 August

Had a very productive day, going to the post and mailing more invitations to our death penalty seminar. At 4.00pm I went to see Valery Rudnev at *Sovetskaya Justitsiya*, the journal of the RSFSR Supreme Court. I complimented him on his recent articles in *Izvestiya*, which were good. He said he thought the de-Partyisation of the RSFSR Supreme Court was a historic step. Not only had they disbanded the Party cell, but the judges had left the Communist Party – something Yeltsin's decree had been careful not to ask. I wondered how he knew they had and he must have read my mind, because he said he was at the Party meeting, he was a Party member and had no intention of leaving it in the foreseeable future.

He'd written a good article from my interview, though if in Irina's rendering I was uttering lines of Voznessensky's poetry, in his I was eulogising Herzen and musing on the "democratisation" of Western society in the 1960s. But I suppose it's horses for courses. *Sovetskaya Justitsiya* wants to run a regular Amnesty column and also wants to become a collective Amnesty member.

From there I went to the USSR Foreign Ministry to collect my visa extension. I was met by Rumyantsev and Sokolenko, both of them in a giggly mood somehow and leaning against the coat desk like wideboys at a bar. My visa has been extended only until *10 September*. A joke! They began to ask intensive questions about our death penalty seminar – who was the Soviet organiser? I said, "I am – if I'm still here", unable to keep the ice out of my voice. They seemed surprised; I don't know what they think I do here. Like people at the Foreign Ministry's Human Rights Division, they seemed bothered that we've invited Galina Starovoytova to speak at it.

Dinner with the Portuguese Ambassador, who was very interesting, saying what it was like to be ambassador at the UN when there's a revolution going on back home. He also talked about the speed of political change in general. In 1955 someone wrote a book about the possibility of giving Zaire independence over thirty years. The critics descended on him. Zaire was independent in four years.

Ian Martin called from London when I got back, and said that if we don't get Soviet approval for our office by the time of the September human rights conference, we will reconsider the whole thing. I hope our listeners-in took it to heart.

Friday 16 August

I'm just back from a two-day trip to Riga to open an Amnesty exhibition which the local group had put on in the Central Library there. We got on the main Latvian-language TV news programmes at 9.00pm and 10.00pm and I did three press interviews.

Since Tuesday I've spent twenty-eight hours on the train and on

Wednesday worked a twenty-hour day, starting at 5.00am. I think I do feel age creeping up on me because I wasn't able to bounce back the way I think I used to.

I left Moscow from Riga station: two tracks in leafy greenness, looking rather like the outer reaches of Southern Region. It was an extraordinary trip. There were nine of us in our small compartment, dominated by Soviet mothers fussing over their fully adult children. There was also an elderly Kazakh lady with no sleeping berth, who'd travelled up from Alma-Ata by train and was going to visit her sick sister in Latvia. When she got to her station she faced a nine-hour wait for her bus and then a two-mile walk with her baggage.

I wondered why everyone went to get their bedding at 4.00pm, but when I went for mine I found out why: there was none left. However, it was an extraordinarily convivial compartment, and two women went and persuaded the conductor to give me his sheets, free. We all shared our food and it was a beautiful ride into a setting sun, through hilly farmland and villages, looking every bit like Cumbria. I fell asleep for an hour and every time I woke up everyone had changed places, like in some Agatha Christie thriller. The old woman sitting next to me suddenly turned and said, "I think God helps you, but sometimes you are a volcano." Rather a conversation stopper. She was a lift operator in an economic institute and said her parents were wonderful people, "real Bolsheviks", who worked all day, then came home and studied. She thought perestroyka was all a big mistake.

Riga is small and like a brighter Amsterdam. There were blocks of cement and huge pieces of twisted metal left over from the January barricades dotting the streets like modern sculptures. Officially people talk about "the January events", but in conversation they call it "the war". The ice cream kiosks are clean and have little flower arrangements on the counter. You can get coffee and pleasant meals in cafés, and it was like a breath of fresh air to hear a middle-aged woman talking to the shop assistant in Latvian. There were long queues in the street for cigarette rations, but otherwise there was a lot of food in the shops, though more expensive than in Moscow.

I was staying with Alexander and Irina, two Russians who have started the local group. They've got a big light flat in the centre of town but no water during the daytime, which is a bugger, because we could only eat at midnight. Irina then stayed up till 4.00am washing clothes. They're helped by Aleksey, who's been collecting signatures outside the Roman Catholic cathedral for a Catholic imprisoned in China. He's spent the last year dossing down at different places and wearing clothes people have given him, but he looks much better than when I first met him in spring in Moscow: tanned, big-boned and with a very sweet smile. He seems to be on some spiritual high and told me

about the religious books he is studying. He thinks each religious movement and each phase of the Bible represents a stage in the religious unfoldment of the individual. “For some Christians,” he said, “Christ is not yet crucified.” I wondered about the lonely life he is leading and asked him how old he is. Eighteen.

The exhibition was beautifully laid out in the main library, with great cooperation from the library staff, who presented us with flowers and gave us coffee afterwards. I had to toe a careful line not to seem like the hand of Moscow, and also to treat Latvia as separate from the USSR. As many times before, I found it a great help in interviews to have a Scottish surname.

The journey home was extraordinary too. Just after the doors closed and we started moving, a strained young woman began proclaiming the Bible the length and breadth of the carriage. I found it absolutely outrageous in a confined space with nowhere to go, to have this voice hammering on right through my earphones for over two and a half hours. However, everyone else seemed much more tolerant than this professional human rights person and listened, or ignored her amiably. Only, when she cried, “Satan’s coming!”, someone said, “No, it’s the conductor with the tea”, and got a laugh.

It’s now 2.30am and I’ve had a very social Friday, eating three full meals in the space of four hours, but none of it went amiss, so I must have been hungry. First there was dinner with Misha and his wife, then I went to the Quakers, then on to the birthday party of Father Nikon’s sister, Ira, at 10.30pm. They were all in their cups by the time I got there, so there were some right daft conversations going on. Nikon was sober though and so was Oleg, and in the kitchen he very nicely asked if I would marry him to help him leave the country before the autumn draft. He pointed out that having a Soviet husband would solve my visa problems too. Now that’s something we never thought of!

Saturday 17 August

A call from the local post office at *6.30am*. Something heavy had arrived, could I collect it? Later, as I was staggering back across the courtyard with two boxes of documents for the CSCE conference, a woman shouted over to me, “Where did you get it?”, obviously thinking it was a dinner set or something. Spent the day working and in the evening met Mum, Dad and Elspeth for dinner at the Cosmos Hotel.

Sunday 18 August

I took them round Red Square, back home for tea, then out to Tatyana’s for the Quaker meeting. Elspeth is very excited by her first step outside Europe and loves Moscow. Dad, however, is going to write a stiff letter to Aeroflot because they didn’t give her the

vegetarian meal he'd ordered. Nikolay says the minister will probably resign. When we came home from the Quakers there were fireworks in the distance for Pilots' Day and children in the metro were wearing their fathers' military caps. There was a lot of activity in my street and a priest was out walking with people in his full priestly garb. Tomorrow is the feast of the Transfiguration, a big date in the Russian Orthodox calendar.

Monday 19 August

At 7.30am Valya rang to ask if I'd heard the news. Gorbachev was deposed last night and a committee of Yanaev, Pugo, Kryuchkov and Yazov have appealed to the nation. I spent a maddening half hour trying to get news. The TV was showing cello and piano duets, and only one channel was working. A strained new newsreader read a long statement about the Union Treaty. I couldn't get the BBC and finally got an official Russian channel, which quoted TASS as saying a state of emergency had been declared nationwide for six months. The Emergency Committee had decreed that all its pronouncements took precedence over republican laws, and said it would honour its international obligations. Radio Liberty said the states of emergency were localised. Apparently the coup may have been timed to forestall the signing of the Union Treaty tomorrow, which would formally have reduced the USSR to nine republics.

I went out to get bread and milk. The shops were busy but everyone was silent, the way they were when the Joint Patrols were introduced. I admire the way Russians take things; they're very politicised, but have an inbred sense of when to keep their own counsel. I couldn't get any line to the Cosmos Hotel – all apparently jammed. I tried to make my appointment with the USSR Foreign Ministry as they had asked, but Marina the secretary said expressively, "*Nikak sevodnya*" – "No way today."

Managed to call the Cosmos Hotel from town at 10.30am and told Elspeth there'd been a coup. "Where?" she asked. Went up and took them all to the Botanical Gardens in the morning, then down town to drop them off at their Intourist City Bus tour. When we came out of Prospekt Marx metro a young man was leafleting at furious speed. It was a call for a general strike by Moscow students. Someone else had the official statement by Yeltsin, Silaev and Khasbullatov, and a big crowd quickly gathered to read it. A man in a black shirt was pressed up behind me and I could feel his heart pounding on my arm. Yeltsin denounced the unconstitutionality of the coup and called for a general strike until Gorbachev is allowed back to report to Parliament.

When we rounded the corner onto the main street we saw the strike had already started. Trolley buses were pulled across the road, blocking each main junction. There was no traffic and people were

milling around the streets. Red Square was blocked off by busloads of troops. Gorky Street was empty except for a lot of pedestrians, all very quiet, but like us, watching for something to happen. A young man walked up the centre of the street shouting that the RSFSR Supreme Soviet was surrounded by troops and calling people to a meeting at 4.00pm. Dad was terribly concerned that Elspeth should get a bus ride round the city, so I came home in the rain. There were armoured cars pulled up in the Manezh amongst the trolley buses and I wondered if they too had joined the strike. Three tanks were lined up by Kammenny Most and foot soldiers were taking up positions. On the way home I bought a melon from two girls in the street and told them there were tanks in the Manezh. They were startled and said, "Maybe something *will* happen then." They'd seen armoured cars and all sorts passing all day.

I listened to the radio and made phone calls. Viktor`s mother said that she'd had a very cultured day watching *Swan Lake*, classical concerts etc. and totally deprived of news. When I got back at night *Swan Lake* was starting its second round. Managed to contact the office, and also the landlord phoned *me*, asking me to call if anything was wrong. Nice.

Met Mum, Dad and Elspeth for dinner at the Moskovskye Zori. Not surprisingly their bus tour had been cancelled. The nine o'clock news came on and we had the full benefit of the Extraordinary Committee's press conference, decree and statements. I noticed nobody watched except me, but everyone must be attuned to the language because suddenly people would guffaw without turning their heads – particularly when Yanaev said they were giving Gorbachev a rest so he could "recoup his strength"; and also when the Committee said that after the first day of the State of Emergency "everyone was visibly breathing more easily". I learned from the broadcast that there is a State of Emergency in six places: Moscow, and presumably the five breakaway republics. Also, oddly enough, that the Committee for Constitutional Supervision has denounced the State of Emergency as unconstitutional. It is quite refreshing and heartening that opposition to the coup is based on legal grounds.

On the way home Yeltsin's fly posters had been put up in the metros. Someone had scrawled on one, "At ten o'clock the tank drivers came over on the side of Russia." I heard later from the Trans-National Radical Party, who are at the barricades, that ten tanks are *rumoured* to have swapped sides.

I keep being overwhelmed by the arrogance of the non-elected Extraordinary Committee, but then I'm just a naive foreigner. They will have their hands full anyway, and I don't know how they expect economic help from the West. Yeltsin is in a fantastically difficult and

important position, but his first statement looked good. Radio Liberty said *Georgian* troops had been brought into Moscow. An odd choice, I'd have thought.

News from elsewhere: I got through to Leningrad at midnight. They've still got their TV channel and Sobchak, the Mayor, has done a strong half-hour broadcast calling for a general strike, threatening to prosecute anyone who obeys the Extraordinary Committee, and promising to defend Leningrad against attack. Viktor is convinced the coup is a bluff, badly timed, and will be over in a week. Apparently two people were named as Extraordinary Committee members without their consent. They have dissociated themselves from it and vowed loyalty to Yeltsin. I lay under my mosquito net, watching the ballerinas and listening to Radio Liberty until the small hours. TV and radio have been seized in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and there was shooting in Riga. The Soviet Embassy in Washington says it has no information except for what it receives from US media.

Tuesday 20 August

The morning news said ten tanks outside the RSFSR Supreme Soviet had turned their turrets round to protect the Parliament. Some paratroopers have also swapped sides. Only nine newspapers are allowed to publish, but one of them, *Izvestiya*, has joined the general strike. Bush came out against the coup, has called for Gorbachev's reinstatement, and refused US economic aid. The World Bank too. The London office rang: half the Kuzbass mines are out on strike. If Gorbachev is under house arrest, Amnesty will take him up as a prisoner of conscience.

I think today was the day of the generation gap. Nikolay came round at breakfast, with no coat, even though it was raining heavily. He'd moved out yesterday because his mother supports the coup. He had no information and was quite frightened. I filled him in with what I knew. He said the Armenian president had come out in favour of the coup. Odd – I'd have thought their future lay with close contact with Russia. It turned out later to be a false rumour.

When I went to pay my phone bill I found a bitter row going on in the queue between a man in his forties and an old guy with short back and sides and rows of medals. The young man was saying, "and what did you defend the country *for*?" The old man and his wife kept saying, "at least there was order and good discipline. The trouble with young people today is that they are degenerate." "And who brought them up that way?" the postwoman suddenly shouted. "Their parents!" According to the medal man, the worst sign of economic collapse is that young men are now selling flowers at the metro. I had to bite my lip several times. Another case of old men's dreams.

I lost Mum, Dad and Elspeth in the metro in the morning, so came

back home to await their anguished call. In the afternoon we went to see the Icon Exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery, which was beautiful, and then sailed down the Moscow River. At night we went out for dinner, picking our way past eleven large tanks outside the USSR Foreign Ministry Press Centre, all their armoury trained on Progress Publishers, for some reason. During the day I noticed all the bridges into the centre are guarded at both ends by tanks, and soldiers were digging something in the roads.

Have had a creeping sense of unease all evening. I learned from wall posters on the way home that there is now a curfew from 11.00pm to 5.00am. I only learned it at 11.30pm. The shortage of information is very disconcerting. Irina rang when I got home; she'd been trying to tell me about the curfew all evening. She'd been to the meeting at the RSFSR Supreme Soviet at midday and said the atmosphere gave a false sense of security. The rumours this evening are that the Moscow Mayor, Gavriil Popov, is under arrest. I saw a fly poster of Sergey Stankevich's speech today. He said the Crimea is sealed off and a number of Gorbachev's assistants are under arrest with him. No one knows what has happened to his wife and daughter. Alongside this there were reports of strikes in Sverdlovsk and Vorkuta, but they seemed like whistling in the dark by comparison.

Oleg rang me at 12.00 and said, "Thank God – you're home." Every time I eat this past week, I get an unpleasant sinking feeling in my stomach. I wonder if it's the start of an ulcer. Heard late at night that the Ukraine has finally come out against the junta.

Wednesday 21 August

Was woken at 5.00am by loud radios through the wall and the ceiling. The neighbours seem to have found some channel of news I don't know about.

The morning BBC said an attempt to take the RSFSR Supreme Soviet fell short last night. One armoured car was petrol bombed, one demonstrator was shot and three were crushed by tanks. There were mass meetings in Leningrad and the army and police are loyal to Sobchak. Tanks were on their way to Leningrad but did not enter. Japan has declared an economic boycott of the USSR. Apparently Pavlov has backed out of the Committee, pleading illness. There are rumours Yazov may have left it too.

Tolya rang about the building works, just back from the barricades where he has spent the last two nights. I felt immensely grateful to him for going there and also admired him. He said Yazov has definitely resigned as Defence Minister and that the feeling is that the KGB are running the coup. Demonstrators apparently seized several cars in the underpass where Kalinin Prospekt intersects with the ring road.

I called several other people. Yelena, seven months pregnant, was also just back from the barricades. She said people are organised now, there are bonfires, and a huge number had just arrived for the morning shift. It is a dismal cold morning with heavy rain.

Tatyana rang. Her son, Sasha, has spent the last two nights at the barricades too. He reckons there were between 30,000 and 60,000 people there. They are being organised by a general who was in Afghanistan, and are divided in blocks and chains, with strict instructions not to resist tanks. Though they are unarmed, their morale is high and the crowd is disciplined. The Ukrainian miners are apparently out on strike. Sasha had called her at midnight to say all was well. Ten minutes later she heard they were about to storm the Parliament and the radio went dead. So she had a worrying night.

I realise I'm in a real state of nerves, constantly running to the toilet, can't settle to anything, and my stomach's very sore. Decided to send the first part of this diary to London with Mum and Dad.

Oleg came round, massively depressed. He feels most of Moscow is apathetic about the coup and many are in favour. Like me he hasn't been to the barricades and got information firsthand, and it seems to be more disconcerting that way.

The British Embassy is asking people to register in readiness for a quick getaway. I'm reluctant to, because I don't want to be made to go "forcibly". Instead I decided to go and register the extension to my visa. On the way into town I noticed the tanks had gone from the bridges. The buses were all up the creek, so I took a taxi for the last stretch. The guy tried to fleece me for dollars, until I convinced him I live in Moscow. Suddenly they announced that the Extraordinary Committee had been arrested! I couldn't believe it. The Visa and Registration Department was shut, so I called on Nikolay and his mother. Nikolay answered the door and said, "They've been arrested!"

He and his mother had bought me flowers as a belated birthday present and had laid out a tea. We then had a very difficult hour, while they argued about the political scene and I was turned to as arbiter. His mother was visibly distressed that the coup had failed. She's a good woman, but thinks the people protecting the Supreme Soviet are all extremists, that they fired first last night, and that the unconstitutionality of the coup is merely a legal trifle. The fact that the Vice President is leading it makes it all kosher. Everything she was saying echoed things I've read in Soviet newspapers for years. When I left she handed me a letter explaining her views. It was immensely sincere and courteous, and ended saying my parents were witnessing "a historic defeat of a bourgeois revolution". She'd written it yesterday. I was struck that she'd taken the trouble to write to me, and perhaps that is the most important thing in our relationship with each

other, because I do not know how to write back.

I felt immensely relieved by the news and I think I was not the only one. People on the tram and the metro were talking about the coup for the first time. Posters had appeared, asking, "Who were the Gang of Eight?" and showing their faces like a "Wanted" poster. When I got home, TV was broadcasting a live session from the Russian Parliament, with Yeltsin reporting back on the stages of the coup. Free television was like rain after a drought and it was a real pleasure watching it.

I had dinner at the Cosmos with Mum, Dad and Elspeth. The TV was on loud and Yeltsin's voice was booming in the hall. The staff all flocked to watch the nine o'clock news, and I noticed as we left that the service staff downstairs were all glued to the TV news too. The curfew has been lifted and Kravchenko, the head of TV and radio, has gone. There may still be civil war, I think, but this battle has been won on the best possible terms, it seems to me. It seems like a "coming of age" somehow. Presumably the republics will now be able to reap some capital from the centre.

I took Mum, Dad and Elspeth to their Leningrad train. They'd spent the day in the rain at Zagorsk in a bus with only ten tourists. An American had asked if tourism had dropped off noticeably since the Gulf War (?). The Intourist guide had said to Elspeth behind her hand, "I don't know, but it's dropped off considerably since 19 August!"

When I got home Lyuda rang from Leningrad and said, "Congratulations!"

Thursday 22 August

Lovely weather, symbolically enough. *Izvestiya* published its uncensored account of the last few days and said that for the first time in possibly seventy-three years Russians had begun to realise "We're not slaves!" I don't think that's an exaggeration. The newsreader on Russian TV broke off to say that for the first time in his life he saw happy faces on the metro. I think that was a bit overdone, but there certainly is a lot of animation and buoyancy. The Visa Registration Department was very busy, but remarkably pleasant and helpful when I went to hand in my visa papers. When I called the USSR Foreign Ministry Humanitarian Affairs Department, Nikolay Smirnov answered and said, "Hello Marjorie, it's Nikolay", with unaccustomed palliness.

I watched the Victory Meeting from outside the Russian Parliament at lunchtime. Muscovites were given their due in good speeches by Yeltsin and Popov, and the crowd was euphoric. All sorts of decrees were announced: nationalising the Communist Party headquarters in Moscow, renaming the square "The Square of Free Russia", proposing a Russian national army, de-Partyising the armed forces, and nominating Yeltsin as Hero of the Soviet Union, which he

has undoubtedly been. It was his day and Gorbachev wasn't mentioned once.

But for all the understandable joy, things teetered on the disconcerting. Father Gleb Yakunin invoked all the Messianic tendencies and said how "Russia" had saved the country, and had saved the world. Shevardnadze, who got the warmest reception from the crowd, said that the dead should be buried in the Kremlin wall and if there wasn't enough room, the other bodies should be dug out. The crowd loved it, but of all sophisticated politicians, why did *he* say that and appeal to those sorts of instincts? The TV commentator later asked why Shevardnadze hadn't taken action to stop the first coup attempts last January. (Irina said she had a lot of questions for the TV commentator, who had led a charmed life in the Brezhnev era.)

Dr Yury Savenko came round in the afternoon and said, "I think we may congratulate each other." Tolya came round after his third night on the barricades and gave a Victory sign.

Gorbachev came back to Moscow – for the first time not sawing the air with his hand, and looking more relaxed and smiling than I've ever seen. In some ways the coup is like an operetta: the President held in some remote exotic place, then restored to the kingdom; the baddies all fleeing to the land beyond the east river. Where were they going? It all seems odd to me. Apparently Yelena Bonner has been asking the same questions. A number of people think Gorbachev was involved in the coup and prepared to come back in charge of the State of Emergency if it was a success. I saw a handwritten sign in the metro that Pugo had shot himself.

Irina and I had planned to go to an Italian film, but it was cancelled, so instead we walked round the barricades, as many other people were doing. There was a huge stench where thousands of people had been going to the toilet over two nights. Lorries and cars were lying on their sides and some things were still smouldering. For all that, the place looked more alive and human than usual. It's normally a very sterile and remote part of town. As we walked back down Herzen Street we were congratulated by a number of drunks, then a huge shower of fireworks burst up over the Kremlin – an impromptu Salute to Victory Day.

I took Irina to look round our office, now half-plastered and whitewashed, but still a bit of a mess. I asked her to use her imagination and she later said the door frames reminded her of the palace at Kuskovo, so I guess she was. She came back for a cup of tea and we had a nice talk. I like her motivation for doing things. She says she's still a lieutenant in the military reserve.

On TV there was a rock concert live from outside the Winter Palace in Leningrad. Somehow rock music seems to sum it all up. It's

energetic and defiant. I heard it blaring from a parked car near the Taganka today and loved it. Everything was so silent during the coup.

Friday 23 August

Last night a crowd pulled down the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky outside the KGB. So, less than a year after it was laid, the memorial stone to Stalin's victims stands alone in Dzerzhinsky Square.

I had a massage from Tanya, who'd also been at the barricades. She was seething about the coup and full of "those Red fucking bastards", through clenched teeth, as she hammered my back. She reckons Gorbachev was in on the coup, after seeing his press conference yesterday. She kept calling him "Gorbaty" – "the hunchback". She said she'd seen a war veteran with all his medals go up the front of the queue yesterday and the crowd had driven him back. *Very* unusual. It really does seem to be a generational thing, this political divide. One of her nice quotes: "They say Raisa had a heart attack. I bet she did – worried about her fur coat."

Saturday 24 August:

Official Day of Mourning in Moscow

I've spent most of the morning crying or near to tears. What seemed like a victory seems more like a tragedy inflicted on a very misfortunate people, and it's not all over yet. Many people spoke at the Manezh, including Gorbachev, but on occasions like that, *who* people really are shows in their tone of voice and the way they can understand grief and express it for everyone else. Yelena Bonner spoke with real suffering in her voice and linked the deaths in Moscow with Baku, Karabakh, Alma-Ata and Vilnius, and also with all the prisoners who died in Perm and Mordovia. She said to families of the dead in Moscow that nothing will ever take away the pain for them, "but I promise you, they did not die in vain". A young Afghan veteran also spoke very simply and movingly.

A rabbi said the Kaddish and a Russian Orthodox choir sang, most of the men young and some crying as they sang. The TV commentator said fighting has started in Georgia and in Baku, so it looks like the civil war comes nearer.

I too think Gorbachev's role in the coup is very suspicious; there are so many unanswered questions. Why, when the RSFSR MPs came to "liberate" him, did he have Lukyanov and Ivashko in one room and three of the putsch committee in another? If he was supposed to be incommunicado, how did he manage to call Arkady Volsky? Shakhnazarov was supposed to be under arrest with him, then rolls up in Parliament on Wednesday. He's now appointed as Minister of Defence the man who supplied the tanks for the coup in Moscow. Really, the country doesn't feel safe from him.

My laundry is shut until 9 September, and as I have no hot water

I took my washing up to Hella and Siffra's. They were both writing their copy until midnight and hyper with exhaustion, after all the last week's events. We started discussing the conspiracy theory, all sceptical at first, then talked ourselves into it more and more. They think Gorbachev will be out in a few days.

Yesterday I took a letter from the London office to the Human Rights Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Smirnov received me, grinning broadly, and said Alexander Bessmertnykh had just been replaced as USSR Foreign Minister. He certainly had a very bald and unconvincing narrative to tell at his press conference, and I later learned that he'd instructed all Soviet embassies to remove Gorbachev's picture. I also dropped material off at the Shevardnadze Association. Shevardnadze was giving many TV interviews. His assistant, Sorokin, said simply, "We have had a great victory."

I finally got my visa registered at the Visa and Registration Department. For the first time they had a TV on, very loudly, and the staff and the queue were watching Gorbachev answering questions from the RSFSR Parliament. Yeltsin humiliated him, using the showman tactics which so disconcert me.

The newspapers are so interesting now, I'm reading them from cover to cover and they take ages. *Izvestiya* has immediately removed Lenin from its masthead and quickly settled its year-long dispute, by getting rid of its reactionary editor.

I felt too down in the dumps to go to Hella and Siffra's party, but they told me on the phone that Gorbachev has left the Communist Party and disbanded it, and the Baltics and Ukraine have declared independence. Suddenly things look interesting again, so I went to the party – all journalists and Dutch Embassy people – and we discussed the situation to death.

In the moonlight Sverdlov's massive statue came down, nose first, before an exultant crowd.

Sunday 25 August

I visited Yelena and Stanislav. I was once again struck by how remarkable Yelena is; in her personal relations she is nothing short of saintly, and at the same time immensely strong. All her inner workings seem to move in the same direction; I suppose that's what integrity means. She has no doubt Gorbachev was involved, and alone of anyone I know, was always convinced it would be over quickly. She also said immediately she would oppose the death penalty for the plotters. No one else was so sure. They'd all been on the barricades, like her.

The Quaker meeting was seven Russians and two Brits. Afterwards we had quite a bitter argument about law versus diktat and the prospects under Yeltsin – probably a sign of all the conflict

that's still to come in the larger scene. Tatyana was marvellous as usual. She said when she saw Sverdlov's statue come down and the Party building sealed, she felt at one level a sense of glee and revenge. At another level she feels the only hope for the future is to avoid that.

On the metro a young man gave a lovely smile to a little girl opposite and she smiled back. Her mother yanked her closer and shot him a pre-coup scowl. I'm certainly seeing a lot more Russian teeth these days; more smiles on buses and the metro, and this morning shopping was positively pleasant.

Well, what do you know: last thing at night it was reported that Belorussia of all places has also declared independence. Tonight I found a mouse sitting right inside my fridge.

Monday 26 August

My next task is to find 200 cups and 200 headsets for the seminar, and a toilet and water heater for the office.

I met Natalya Vysotskaya at the USSR Ministry of Justice, and with a fascinating mixture of charm and aggression, she got them to clarify in writing that we are not eligible to register as a public organisation. She suggests we do the same about registering as a commercial enterprise. I think the coup last week has brought more tension than relief. She said all the lawyers at her consultancy had supported it, except her, and they told her she was dishonouring the calling of an advocate. She got annoyed with me and said that if I lived here for a month as a Soviet, I would hang myself. She can't bear the strain of going to bed at night and not knowing what will happen tomorrow.

She wanted to pop into the Baptist headquarters nearby and I wanted to start my search for the toilet. I was just getting tired of waiting for her, when I was invited in to eat with them all. It turned into a very interesting day. Their centre is an imposing old private house, totally wrecked inside. They were busy with many visitors. Everyone looked rather poor and the young people were the sort you might expect to see at a youth club in Britain. We ate a very nice home-cooked meal at small clean tables, and after some painful small talk we had a very interesting discussion about the coup. Vera, a middle-aged Baptist, had also been at the barricades. She couldn't understand why the KGB, who are so adept at planning and forestalling coups abroad, couldn't pull it off here. She also thought the attempts to resurrect the Union Treaty are a "Bolshevisation of thought". Republics will have their sovereignty or independence, then cooperate without it.

We went to meet the head of the Soviet Baptists, Bychkov, and here the tensions re-emerged. He got angry about the role of the Russian Orthodox Church now and right back in 1917, because he

said it had bolstered the state so significantly and enabled the revolution. However, I was struck that Baptists obviously do good prison work. He was very positive about Amnesty and about Quakers.

The amazing thing was that I left the Baptists with a toilet! I got talking to some of the nice ordinary staff, who then produced the toilet free of charge and got someone to drive it and me round to the office. I wondered what I would find as I was arriving unannounced, but the lights were on and three men were busily working. They were very pleased with the toilet and all said goodbye, smiling nicely.

Natalya's the first person to tell me she's at risk by having contact with me. In the evening I went round to people who don't feel that. Irina and her mother gave me a lovely dinner, including my first fish outside a restaurant. It was their first fish too. It's interesting watching them together. Natalya Ivanovna is another of these redoubtable Soviet mothers, e.g. she has done a translation of Keats' sonnet 'To Sleep' in her spare time, and is basically terribly intelligent and philosophical in her style. They both seemed worried about me and about my future.

Natalya Ivanovna had a funny story about visiting Czechoslovakia in 1977 and the terrible hostility she felt, which was hard to bear as she also opposed the invasion. The taps in her bathroom didn't work, so she eventually asked if she could change rooms. The woman at the desk said, "You work to a five-year plan and so do we. Your request will go into the next one."

Gorbachev's secretary has been telling how she smuggled a tape out of Foros in her knickers. She didn't seem to be able to get over it, because she mentioned it three times, with giggles. Later the interviewer held up a tape and she said, "That's the one I smuggled out in my knickers!" "No it isn't, it's another one," he said crossly.

Tuesday 27 August

It's cold and wet again, but my hot water came back on again for the first time in six weeks. A day of writing letters and phoning round about headsets, water heaters and the costs of typesetting and printing Amnesty materials here. Later finished off by doing my accounts for July and August. I've got an embarrassment of toilets: Todd Weinberger has come up trumps with one for me.

A French Amnesty member came round with her Norwegian friend. They had been on the trans-Siberian railway when the coup started and felt vulnerable in a moving train somewhere outside Omsk. Yelena and Stanislav have bought me tickets for a week in Tomsk with them. Marvellous!

Wednesday 28 August

I managed another trip to the steam baths at midday, but otherwise the day was a great race against time to catch the night

train to Siberia. More phoning and trading in the morning, then an afternoon spent delivering things.

When I met Svetlana Polubinskaya to give her the interim report of the World Psychiatric Association Review Committee, I was having trouble with my ice cream. She very nicely held a polythene bag underneath to catch the drips. She'd been at her *dacha* all through the coup and said, "Things are far from over."

Called on the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies to apply for advance passes for Amnesty to observe the human rights conference in September. Not possible, apparently. The whole event sounds like an exercise in damage control by the USSR Foreign Ministry. In a way that made my blood run cold, Zaitsev said, with some satisfaction, "I hear you're having trouble with premises for your seminar." "Not as far as I know," said I. Apparently the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs had rung *him* to say there would be complete redecoration at Moscow University's Faculty of Journalism, so they wouldn't be able to host Amnesty. It half-crossed my mind to ask if the Ministry of Internal Affairs was always so involved with redecoration plans, but I decided not to react – although I'm sure my face gave me away.

I came away feeling really threatened. They've blocked our office registration, they've blocked my visa, and now they're trying to disrupt our seminar. At least it does show that the seminar is in a good place and they are taking it seriously.

Two very funny things happened before the end of the day. Oleg rang up out of the blue, offering me another hall with facilities for synchronised translation. Then I called the Dean of the Faculty of Journalism, expecting to hear his excuses about the seminar. Instead he was charming and positive, and said there are no problems with the premises. He made some caustic remarks about the Friendship Society and how they would love to ensure a small audience. So, the fight is on!

Journey to Siberia

I never thought I would set off for Siberia with only a light jumper, but Yelena and Stanislav assure me it is summer in Tomsk. It was a dark wet night in Moscow, and when I arrived at Yelena's, nine adults were standing waiting for me in the hall with luggage. We set off, a raggle-taggle group of ex-prisoners and hangers-on, then flagged down a car to take three of us and nine bags to the Kazan station.

Once we were in the coupe, out came the computer, the water melon and all the other things essential when you're travelling light here. It turned out we'd remembered and forgotten all the same things, so we had lots of bread, cheese and carrots, and no cups, spoons or knives. We sat round sharing tea from a jam jar. The fourth person in our coupe was a young and silent Kirghiz soldier, on his way

to Novosibirsk. Yelena eventually asked him if he'd been involved in the coup in Moscow, but he said not. Throughout the three days I kept seeing a long brown arm descending to drop a melon rind, or a bare calloused foot slipping down into some big muddy army boots. The door to our coupe continually jammed shut and provided a *leitmotif* for the journey. When Yelena and I were having an English lesson, the soldier was throwing himself at the door as though he couldn't get out fast enough.

I spent the first day in a kind of bovine stupor. Yelena woke me up when we crossed the Volga and we later pulled in to Kazan in Tatarstan. The train passed through endless meadows and birchwoods, with little peasant huts occasionally dotted by the railway. The next day we travelled through the Omsk steppe, which looked the way I imagine the US prairies to be: grasslands with occasional herds of cattle. The towns en route were like frontier towns too: water cylinders on tall legs, dwarfing wooden ranch houses. In the evening we pulled into Omsk, passing a lot of US containers going west from the Pacific, then crossed the big Irtysh River. Yelena got out at 1.00am to pay her respects at Barabinsk, the town where Anatoly Marchenko was born. The temperature plummeted in the Siberian night. We headed across the Ob River and when I woke up, we were going north up the single-track branch line to Tomsk. This whole trip has cost 71 roubles, or under £2. It costs £2.10 to get from Heathrow to Brixton.

The first time Yelena came here she was under escort by three armed soldiers and beginning her five years' exile. I first met her two years ago, when she was profoundly depressed at the end of her sentence and also planning to enter a convent. I was musing on how she's changed since then, and watching her sorting her reflection in the train window, adjusting her dress and fiddling with her hair. When everything was looking nice, like all nice people, she said, "Ghastly!"

We're spending the day at Stanislav's hut in Timiryazevo outside Tomsk and have been out gathering mushrooms in the rain. When we got here it was like a scene from Chekhov. We were met by Boris Anatolyevich, a small, faded man with bright blue eyes, and a young guy called Aleksey, whose wire spectacles were all at an angle. Stanislav sat on the stoop telling them about the coup and showing them pictures from the Moscow newspapers. They didn't know Dzerzhinsky's statue had been pulled down, and were incredulous and tickled to hear that it had. "Did it immediately shatter?" Aleksey asked.

Yelena and Stanislav put me in the new room to write this diary, looking out at the garden, while they got water, washed the floor, chopped wood, dug vegetables and were generally fantastically busy.

There was no spoon, so Stanislav carved one out of wood. We had *borshch* and stew from vegetables in the garden, then Stanislav sang a nice song about being lonely travelling by train. Yelena and I slept in the kitchen by the stove with the dogs and cats, and Stanislav slept up in the loft.

Sunday 1 September

When I woke Yelena was dressed and standing in a corner with her back to the room, saying her prayers. We had one lazy breakfast, then discovered the delights of raspberries from the garden, so had another one.

We then set off across the fields for the bus to Tomsk, this time with nine bags, a cooking ring, frying pan and a dog. A little girl in Pioneer uniform came running up with a certificate, back from her first day at school. Tomsk is an ancient, wooden town with tramlines running down the middle, all overgrown with grass. There is a small Tatar quarter with mosque down by the river, but the main street reminded me of small towns in the US Midwest. Until January this year it was a closed town. The local Party buildings have just been sealed up and the "Boards of Honour" were all blank. Yelena and Stanislav gave me some Tomsk ration cards for soap, flour, butter and sugar, all worthless because, despite rationing, the goods are just not there to be had. Apparently to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Great October Revolution, everyone got a ration card for meat, as a present. People were not amused and it almost provoked a riot.

We'd missed the hydrofoil river bus up the Ob to Krivosheyno, so spent the day visiting their friends. We had baths and a meal at the Strombergs, a lovely family of Soviet Germans, all physicists and chemists. Yesterday was the fiftieth anniversary of the deportation of Soviet Germans. There's a four-hour time gap with Moscow and so they'd only learned about the coup at midday from someone's car radio in the street.

From there we visited other friends and ended up at another German family, the Fasts. He's a terrific, prophetic-looking man. In years gone by they had made it their business to find out who was exiled to Tomsk Region and had helped them, at great risk to themselves. Now Wilhelm is on Tomsk Regional Soviet and has been compiling lists of local people killed in the purges for "Memorial". He himself was imprisoned in the Tayshet camps.

Their three-year-old grandson, David, wants to be a deacon. He stood on a stool facing the icon on the wall, and all the adults stood behind him, while he said grace. I couldn't follow a word of what he was saying, but every so often everyone else would cross themselves. There was also no stopping him and he went from one prayer to another. Eventually someone said, "That's enough, David, or we'll

never eat." He seemed extraordinarily bright and over dinner looked up and said, "What's a category?"

Monday 2 September

We had a fantastic sail up the River Tom and along the River Ob to Krivosheyno: the length of Britain and more, for 12 roubles (25p). The sky was blue, some of the trees were turning yellow or red, and the Ob makes huge sweeps to left and right. The riverbanks are eroding at a great rate, so at some points there are big sandy cliffs with trees lying tangled in the water. There were cows on the shore when we reached Krivosheyno jetty. We piled out and walked 1km up a grassy cliff to the last hut on Kolkhoz Street, which was Yelena's place in exile. The vegetable plot was shoulder-high in weeds. When we went into the hut my heart quailed, because it was like the seventeenth-century cottages at Culloden. There was a shed and an outer room, both dark and dilapidated, then an inner room, which was somehow recognisably Yelena's. The walls were whitewashed, there were yellow curtains, books on the shelves, and a beautiful icon in the corner. Thieves had been in previously and stolen a lamp and some books. Yelena had lived here, washing floors at the club and making hockey sticks at the local factory.

The weather was gorgeous and the forest was light and peaceful, but for seven months of the year the temperature is -40 degrees, and the snowdrifts so deep you can't get down the street. I don't know how Yelena did it. In the evening we visited neighbours who had a phone, so I could call the USSR Foreign Ministry about my visa. They lived in a bare, neat cottage, and although it was in deepest Siberia, it seemed suburban somehow. The wife was in a nice housecoat, with two children hanging around in the background, and she seemed to be waiting for something. All the locals had been warned against Yelena when she was in exile, so I wondered how they would react to her now. I think everyone liked her very much, but her political remarks are so acute, I noticed everyone would laugh and agree with her, then shoot her a disconcerted glance. On the way home we stopped by an eighty-year-old woman and her daughter, both still farming, and got a jar of fresh milk. The eighty-year-old looked at me and said, "Who's this you've got with you?" She bemoaned the political situation and said, "I'm for Soviet power."

A friend of Yelena and Stanislav was also staying at the hut with her son. I realise I'm a useless guest, because she immediately began washing the floors and digging potatoes, while I sat there in a dream. We then had rather a strange evening in this silent, starry Siberian night, with enough emotion in the hut to drive a battleship. Ira, the friend, had a desperately unhappy face. I was the first foreigner she'd ever met in her life, and it seemed to have a peculiar effect on her, as

though she felt compelled to account for herself and tell me everything. Stanislav lit a bonfire and sang some songs, and every so often the other two would rise up out of the circle of light and stand in the dark by the gate, or in the garden, sighing.

We ate inside by candlelight and so the effect was repeated: Ira's face opposite me, unburdening everything, while the other two moved about the room in the dark, listening. At one point Ira moved out of the light and in moved Yelena, to ask me if I knew an English poem with the words, "Our hands have touched, but not our hearts, and they shall never touch again". Apparently it's the only non-jolly poem they learned at school and so she'd remembered it.

Just time to negotiate the outdoor toilet with a dynamo torch that you have to continually pump, then bed. In the middle of the night the dog went mad catching a mouse in the dark. Frightened me to death.

Tuesday 3 September

Had a lovely breakfast with Yelena. For some unspoken reason she very much wanted me to see the hut, and I very much wanted to see it.

It was interesting watching what Yelena and Stanislav decided I needed to have with me on my journey back home, and a bit funny. In the end they gave me a jar of jam, a bag of raw potatoes, some dried mint and a candle. Scenes like that make me feel very fond of humanity at large.

I remember on the train to Tomsk we were dipping into a bag of sweets. Yelena noticed I liked the flat ones, so she looked out the last three for me, and that one gesture opened up the whole gap between a Russian background and a Scottish Presbyterian one. Here, life is seen as hard and nothing is nicer than to indulge someone and give them a treat. There, the fact you like something is no particular reason to have it: "You needn't think life's always going to be so easy." Somehow the child in me really responded to those three sweets.

I've been thinking about what is so appealing about so many of the people I know here who, despite difficulties or imprisonment, try to build the life they want and be what they want to be. It seems to be connected with a real intelligence; an urge to make sense of their surroundings and of themselves, which is in no way connected to an Oxbridge education and smart remarks. Nor is it connected with all the recognisable trappings of the Soviet intelligentsia.

Yelena walked us to the crossroads, then Stanislav and I went on over the bridge, past the rows of huts with their geese, dogs and chickens, and up to the bus station next to the cinema, which shows *Rambo* and Indian melodramas. We then bussed to Tomsk, passing fields of sunflowers and Siberian cowboys rounding up their cattle on

horseback. Intensively farmed, however, it definitely is not. The trees and the fields were gorgeous and more natural and beautiful than an autumn in Massachusetts.

We spent the day in Tomsk before my evening train. Called in on Tomsk City Soviet, which now occupies the imposing Communist Party building on a main street. There I re-met the nice Vladimir Kryukov, whom I first met briefly in Leningrad last year. He's bought his plane ticket to come to our death penalty seminar in Moscow. Apparently Tomsk City Soviet was one of the first to come out against the coup; they did it by Monday midday. There was a movement for autonomy here in the nineteenth century and it is now reviving, along more rational lines. They no longer want to be a dumping ground for prisoners and exiles, nor to have their natural resources sucked away.

I took the train down the branch line to Tayga Junction. As we rounded the corner out of Tomsk we came bang slap onto what was recognisably a corrective labour colony: the big sliding gate, watchtowers, a soldier with an Alsation, and a flat-capped commandant standing about, looking at his watch. I spent an uncomfortable hour in the dark at Tayga Junction, trying to hear the loudspeaker announcement for the Vladivostok train to Moscow.

Wednesday 4 September

What a journey home! Until Tyumen I shared the coupe with a couple who were deeply suspicious of this foreigner who had stepped onto the train at Tayga Junction. Then, in a very Russian style, the woman suddenly burst out laughing at me and said I looked like a rabbit when I was eating.

Their place was taken by three young gas workers on their way to Moscow for a holiday and dying to get drunk. They were sharply dressed and had a bag of US chicken legs – altogether very chic. I left them to it and they eventually had a fist fight over a shirt in the corridor. The good woman conductor broke it up and one of the boys came to me and very nicely apologised, looking up at me with short hair, big ears and earnest blue eyes. He said he was reading Seneca and Nietzsche and trying to "discover himself for himself". I asked him what he did and he said, "Nothing. I'm a criminal." I was half amused, and half thought, *Oh blimey*.

One of them passed out and snored from 4.00pm to 7.00 the following morning. At Sverdlovsk we were joined by a portly oil prospector, who also snored. The oil man and the gas workers instantly disliked the look of each other, but by the end of the next fifteen hours I came to the conclusion that more united them than divided them. They were all pro-Yeltsin; all felt that capitalism is not for Russia, although new economic forms are needed; all had a mystical faith in "the people" – "*narod*"; and all felt there is no racism

in the USSR and couldn't understand what all the fuss with national minorities is about. By this time they were all sitting in a chummy row on the opposite seat. I asked if any of them spoke any USSR language apart from Russian and none did. They felt this was unwelcome provocation on my part and drew closer together. All of them hated blacks.

The oil man had some interesting and original points of view, but every time he mentioned "power" he made a gesture with his fist, as though he was squeezing someone's testicles, hard.

Friday 6 September

I've got a lot of work to catch up on. Wrote thirty letters and took Amnesty's paper on the USA to the Institute of Systems Analysis, where some moonlighters are prepared to print it on the side. Began the stations of the cross with the USSR Foreign Ministry to get my visa renewed.

Tanya came round and gave me a fantastic massage. She's part gypsy and was brought up in an orphanage. Her Russian is too difficult and colloquial for me most of the time, but it's quite nice to be reduced to a state of almost mute incomprehension with this extremely earthy and vigorous person. She told me how she had nearly drowned at the age of seven, and had inwardly said goodbye "to the Motherland and to Stalin".

Saturday 7 September

Irina and I went to the Henry Moore Exhibition at the Pushkin Museum. Everyone was poring over the pictures then giving a quick look at the labels, except Irina, who was poring over the labels and giving a quick look at the pictures. A true philologist. She also wanted to see a visiting US Baptist choir, but as she had felt too inhibited to cheer with the crowd in the Square of Free Russia after the coup, I wondered how she would take to it. It was quite a chilling experience, we both found. I thought one song was about using the Bible as a doorstop, but it was about using it as a roadmap. There are no detours on the road to heaven.

Monday 9 September

Thus began an immensely busy week. I walked from one side of Moscow virtually to the other, delivering an invitation to our death penalty seminar to the USSR Ministry of Justice; paying the Baptists for the toilet; dropping into *Stolitsa* with ideas for an article; lunching with a British actor who wants to do a benefit for Amnesty; going to the Moscow College of Advocates; seeing the Russian Foreign Ministry about our registration; and seeing the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs about my visa.

I was met at the USSR Foreign Ministry by Rumyantsev and Aleksandr Khlopyanov and taken for coffee. Khlopyanov is now a

political analyst for Churkin, the press spokesman of the ministry, but has still kept our brief, apparently. To his great credit he does not pretend to have been a closet democrat all along, and when I gave him our report about women, he quoted Lenin about the importance of women in society. He's rather subtle and in the twilight of the Press Centre café, dropped enigmatic hints for half an hour about how Amnesty is perceived in the USSR. Basically positively, I thought was the message.

They extended my visa only until 4 October and I said that wasn't totally satisfactory. They then very nicely said, "We don't know if we'll be here after then – this is best, trust the experience of old bureaucrats." They said that Communists now face the risk of persecution and asked if Amnesty would take up their cases. I said we defend imprisoned Communists in many countries and would in the USSR too. They then asked if we would protest a death sentence against the coup plotters, and when I said yes, we all smiled and savoured the irony a moment in silence. I felt I was witnessing the twilight of the gods.

Khlopyanov has always been unfailingly courteous and efficient with me and I quite like him. His impression is that no one is yet prepared to take responsibility for Amnesty.

From there I headed to the Russian Council of Ministers, which yesterday moved to the old headquarters of the Communist Party on Staraya Ploshchad, newly "unsealed". Vladimir Chernyega was busy with the Russian Foreign Minister so I waited downstairs. A group of US visitors swept in, apparently to check security for James Baker's visit. Affirmative action was obviously at play, because there was one black guy, whom everyone ignored, a forceful woman, and an absolute pillock. The Russian police guarding the building were the new generation: heavily armed, but totally approachable and nice. I went to the toilet and one of them carried my briefcase. I said it was the first time I'd been to the toilet at rifle point and he said, "Look on it as protection." The corridors were strewn with old Communist Party furniture, which I fancied having for our office. Chernyega was very positive about our registration and said the man handling it would be Vyacheslav Bakhmin, the ex-prisoner of conscience. Light at the end of the tunnel!

During the day, and thanks to a friendly secretary, I delivered Amnesty's complaints to the USSR Foreign Ministry about poor access to the September human rights conference. At night Vladimir Babenkov, the man responsible for the arrangements, called me at home, very angry, and asking what all the fuss was about. The upshot was we got the access we wanted.

Tuesday 10 September

This morning the USSR Ministry of Justice called, saying they were interested in helping us to register and suggesting a meeting tomorrow. All this attention is getting ridiculous.

I sorted out office repairs with Tolya and the printing of our document on the USA, then in the afternoon went to suss out the lecture hall for our seminar at the Faculty of Journalism with the sound engineers and Oleg. There was an interesting moment when the Dean asked them suspiciously, "Who are you? Are you with Amnesty?" Oleg said, "Yes, I'm with Amnesty", and exchanged a nice look with me. I discovered he's going to do all the interpretation himself, and free of charge. A real gift, because he's good.

Wednesday 11 September

I had a maddening morning at the USSR Ministry of Justice with Natalya Vysotskaya. We met Nikolay Zubkov, who smiled and smiled as he fiddled with his glasses nervously, and whose sole concern seemed to be how to put off writing an official reply to the letter we sent him about registering. You would have thought we were discussing disarmament in Europe, not some simple bureaucratic task. Little wonder the USSR has fallen apart.

Had a better afternoon, meeting a young psychiatrist who works in the Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry, oddly enough, but who staffed the medical unit at the barricades during the coup and wants to join Amnesty. He says lots of people come to him severely depressed by the situation. He feels a fraud, because he persuades them they'll feel better in two months, then two months later there's a coup. Since the coup I've noticed lots more drunks in the street, and lots more children playing with plastic guns.

I looked over the finished interview with the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* journalist. He'd made a silk purse out of a sow's ear and it was very good indeed. From there I dashed to see the British actor Peter Gale starring in *The Unpardonable Sin of Maud Allen*. I went backstage to congratulate him and found him telling local reporters that all proceeds would go to our Amnesty office in Moscow. It was touching.

Thursday 12 September

We have managed to track down the materials that were sent to the Moscow Book Fair and then disappeared into limbo. Twenty-five boxes arrived at my flat this morning. In the afternoon Misha kindly came with me to persuade the kitchens at the Faculty of Journalism to prepare refreshments for our seminar. He is the most unpresumptuous of men, but I was amused to hear him introduce us as the Organising Committee of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Anyway, it worked. I bought plastic cups for hard currency.

In the evening I escaped for dinner with Irina and her mother. At some magic moment her mother instructed us to open their bottle of

vermouth and after three tumblers-full each, she began to recite sonnets she had written herself.

Friday 13 September

People from the London office are over here for the conference, so I took them out for a good dinner. Had a good lunch too, at the Metropol hotel with someone from the Council of Europe Human Rights Division. He said Shevardnadze is far from euphoric after the coup, and is particularly worried about the Ukraine.

On Saturday afternoon I showed someone from London round the office, which looked great. They are levelling the floor, everything is replastered, the rooms are painted pale grey or pale beige, the windows are white and the toilet is in place and the room all cleanly tiled. Very satisfying.

Yeltsin commuted twenty-one death sentences tonight.

Sunday 15 September

I spent thirteen hours crouching by the twenty-five boxes, collating and stapling materials for our death penalty seminar, helped by two good folk from Amnesty in London and Germany. Finally finished at 1.00am. I'm very worried that I can't make contact with Galina Starovoytova. Irina thinks she saw her speaking from Paris yesterday.

The USSR Ministry of Justice rang again (!) urging us to try registering with Moscow City Soviet's Justice Department.

Monday 16 September

Our seminar and a beautiful crisp day. Oleg arrived at 8.30am to take me and materials to the hall, and as we passed the Communist Party's hotel on Dimitrov Street I asked if he thought Honecker was hiding out there. He said no, there were mansions outside Moscow for people "of that calibre".

Had mixed feelings about the seminar: the sound system, the interpretation and buffet were very good, as were Larry Cox and Roger Hood, the two guest speakers. The audience was very serious and we collected some money, but there was not a huge turnout and it was a big lack that our Soviet speaker did not turn up. The woman from the Statistics Department of the USSR Ministry of Justice came, commandeered the microphone, and declaimed from the podium. One interesting point though: she said, "Of course the death penalty is *not* a deterrent." She's changed her tune since we met in March. Larry and Roger visited the GUM department store and were appalled. I think they got their first insight into life here.

Tuesday 17 September

I was absolutely knackered and spent the day being late. Everyone else seemed to be in the same state. I couldn't get a bus to the Justice Department so eventually flagged down a car. The driver

was a very interesting man from a foreign relations institute, specialising in Ethiopia and Somalia, and said what an impact Amnesty had had on President Siad Barre. However, he still had the lurking suspicion that we are always sticking our noses where we're not invited. I said that in a sense that was true, because very few governments invite you to look at the way they treat political prisoners. Eventually he refused to take any money from me, parked the car, and escorted me to the Justice Department so I arrived on time.

Here Natalya Vysotskaya and I met a very different animal from the people at the USSR Ministry of Justice. Mr Kostanov has got our death penalty report, would like to have it autographed and thinks Amnesty could really help their efforts to humanise the prison system. He recommended that we apply for a "mini-embassy" status attached to the Moscow City Soviet or to the Ministry of Justice, and promised to push our case within the week. Natalya and I fell silent.

From there I made my way to the Russian TV Centre to discuss our Human Rights Day programme on 10 December. I stopped off in a park for a breather, and who should be there but the "rather good-looking" Vladimir Alimov again, also drawing breath before our meeting. He was looking utterly exhausted and ghastly.

Saw off the London gang at lunchtime, then bumped into Lev Yelin from *New Times*, who said he'd done a piece on Amnesty's report about China and got an official complaint from the Chinese government. Good sign. I also bumped into Oleg Malginov, the First Secretary at the Humanitarian Affairs Division of the USSR Foreign Ministry. He asked, "How are your relatives?" Apparently he had heard at the UN in Geneva that Mum, Dad and Elspeth were here during the coup.

Komsomolskaya Pravda published my interview today – half a page spread over five columns.

Wednesday 18 September

I met people from the Krasnodar group against the death penalty. As we chatted on the park bench the woman next to us butted in and said we were a threat to society. We began to talk with her, and suddenly the young man next to *her* butted in. Eventually there were five of us all discussing the death penalty, and I must say that Olga from Krasnodar was excellent.

In the afternoon I did an English-language interview with the Soviet World Service, with a very nice elderly China specialist, Oleg Solovyov. He threw in a gift question about China, and ended by announcing to the world that he hoped Amnesty would soon get official registration. He drove me home in time to meet the landlord, lo and behold with his wife in tow – the first time she's seen the flat

since I moved in, and there it was looking wrecked with twenty-five cardboard boxes. However, they were very excited by the article in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and seemed to be treating me with a new respect. Yulia had brought me apples and Sasha had a sort of man-to-man talk with me about world affairs. Interestingly, he said he was against a death sentence for the coup plotters. That also represents a change since the beginning of the year. The poor guy is still trying to get his cheque out of the bank; it's been three months now. He'd spent one and a half days in one queue, only to find it was the wrong one. Great basis for doing business, this banking system.

Thursday 19 September

A beautiful cold autumn day, and it was my day for meeting prisoners. First Valery Yanin, released from Camp 35 in Perm last week after sixteen years, and still suffering from broken ribs after the pulverising he'd got before his release. He'd spent *seven* years in solitary confinement. He was thin, white and very revved up. I wonder what it will be like for him when he hits the ground.

In the afternoon I met a conscientious objector from Ukraine, who is probably about twenty, but very withdrawn and rather "tough". Every time I asked a question, like "How are your parents?", he said, "Meaning?" He wants to join Amnesty.

In between I had a nice hour with Ruslan, who's at long last got his foreign passport. I'll miss him when he leaves on 29 September. He'd brought apples because it was too cold for beer, and as usual had a lot of silly anecdotes and interesting observations about human nature. He really seems to be over his imprisonment.

A strange thing today in the metro: the sexy woman's voice that normally advertises job vacancies for plumbers etc. announced that Alexander Solzhenitsyn's books were on sale at the Sports (?) Bookshop. Everyone silently pricked up their ears and when I looked round the escalator the man behind me was trying to memorise the phone number.

Lada from the Moscow Amnesty group came round and collected four boxes of materials from my flat, to my great relief.

Friday 20 September

A letter in *Izvestiya* today was like a short story. It was from a man who felt guilty that he had not prevented a suicide. He'd seen a guy standing on a ledge on the fifth floor of the Hotel Vostok, but as he stood there wondering what to do he was suddenly afraid he would be dragged through the courts as a witness. He wondered if he should get the hotel concierge, but then thought they might frighten the man into jumping, and so become accomplices to murder. So he went to the bathhouse and had a shave. When he came out the guy was on the tarmac, dead. He learned later that the concierge had rung the police,

an ambulance, the district Soviet etc., but had also gone nowhere near the man on the ledge.

I spent five hours today at the Customs Department in Butovo, trying to retrieve the computer which a Swedish Amnesty group had sent to the ex-prisoner, Pavlo Kampov, back in February. The depot is way beyond the forest south of Moscow and I took a metro, a bus, and had a long walk through seas of mud to get there. Butovo itself looked like some Solzhenitsyn village by a railway line: ugly, brutish and small. I had to liaise with a woman in the main building and a man in the warehouse, and one or the other of them kept disappearing for an hour at a time. "Well, it's Friday," someone smiled, as though that explained it all. "It's my Friday too," I said acidly, and for some reason this seemed to cut some ice, probably because I'm foreign. Eventually it got sorted out.

The Unpardonable Sin of Maud Allen had been replaced by Edward Albee, so Irina and I came back here for a chat. She was wearing everything she'd made herself, and at six foot looked immensely stylish, a characteristic she shares with her mother.

Saturday 21 September

I'm dying for a break, but no chance just yet. I met Alexander Kalinin's wife in the metro. A local city deputy, he's just finished his nineteen-day hunger strike over appointments that Moscow City Soviet is making. Then I had lunch at Yugo-Zapadnaya with Yelena's aunt and uncle, he's a retired army man. An office block is going up opposite them and there were handwritten posters saying the Turkish workers were on strike. A division of tanks had been stationed by them during the coup, and they could see and hear this deafening procession setting off for the centre of town.

I then met Tolya and in the pouring rain we went to the Moskvoretsky flea market to buy an electric cooker for the office: £50, new. We negotiated with a man with an army van to take it to Herzen Street and it was all in place by six o'clock. At 7.00pm I took a visiting Danish Amnesty member out for dinner, and then he collected three boxes of materials from my flat. He's here to follow the CSCE human rights conference.

Sunday 22 September

The view from the window this morning was like a tarot card. Three birds were sitting in the tree with their faces into the breeze and yellow leaves streaming away behind them. Autumn is really here. I had a lovely morning in bed, reading.

In the afternoon I went to Tolya's for dinner. He'd made a lovely *borshch*, casserole and salad, and an apple pie. We listened to his son playing his own very good piano compositions. He can't write words in English, so had made settings of old folk songs like *Carrickfergus*.

They sounded strange and quite wonderful. Valya arrived, as usual dynamic and full of schemes and interesting ideas. We'd just watched an hour of Walt Disney and then a US gospel group started up. The breathy lead singer said how wonderful Soviet people are: "Why, they are just like Americans!" Valya said, "Gee, thanks for the compliment." She is boycotting the cinema because she can never see any good Soviet films – there are so many bad US ones.

I had a lovely stroll along Vavilov Street, not hurrying anywhere. At night a phone call from home telling me I've got a court summons from Lambeth about my poll tax.

Tuesday 24 September

I feel we are making real progress. This morning I took our China news release to the Soviet World Service, and Oleg Solovyov volunteered any help he could give us, through contacts or publicity. Tonight the editor of *Izvestiya* rang, having got my note, and wanting all our press releases in future.

I had an interesting meeting today: new people are turning to Amnesty, and some funny ones at that. I had to speak with two nice women from the Gagauz minority whose husbands were arrested in Moldova straight after the coup. They are sponsored here, however, by Russian nationalists and were accompanied by a woman from the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, who couldn't hide her hostility to Amnesty, and looked at me as though I was offering her dog dirt when I shook her hand. However, I cheerily included her in the interview, gave her Amnesty's advert, and asked if she would like our new report on the USA. When she was bemoaning the injustice inflicted on these women's husbands, I wondered if any sense of irony or conscience flickered behind those impassive features, but very much doubted it.

Got chilled to the bone with all this sitting on benches and so popped into McDonald's for the first time, for a cup of tea. Unlike other Soviet shops, the customer area is a sea of tranquillity, while people are going frantic behind the counter. It looked and sounded like the floor of the Stock Exchange. US division of labour driving them to an early grave.

Wednesday 25 September

Today *Le Monde* casually ascribed a 30% reduction in Moldovan production to "a group of overexcited Ukrainian and Russian women, blocking the trains". What a world we live in. Will they ever ascribe the First World War to a group of overexcited men?

I seem to have an internal body clock here, and although things are alright I'm suddenly ready to go home. I'm sick of speaking Russian, and really tired. I spent the day catching up on letters to enquirers and also trying to arrange the beginnings of a medical support network. Sleeping really badly and woke exhausted again.

Thursday 26 September

Suddenly an Indian summer. Despite all our efforts, none of today's papers carried our China report. I met Tolya to pay the next instalment of the builders' money and gave an interview to Hungarian radio. Four big boxes of computer bits arrived from the Customs Depot at Butovo for Pavlo Kampov, to add to the lousy mess of fifteen boxes already in my room. Very depressing to live with. I fell asleep again, then went round for tea with a friend at the British Council.

Her flat smelt of Flash; we drank tea with milk, and had Sainsbury's lime marmalade. The Britishness felt like a brief respite. She had just won a one-woman strike to prevent Moscow University moving three unknown men into her flat on 1 October. She had a funny story about Margaret Thatcher's visit to MGIMO in May. An adoring student asked how she had managed to be a wife and mother and to run the country? Brushing aside Denis's millions and the staff of twenty, she said, "There are no queues in Britain"! Would that these remarks got home.

From there I hitched a lift to Yelena's place with a pleasant man from the defence industry. He's worried that the Russian government is not doing enough to fill the shops and that soon the situation will be ripe for a second coup. At Yelena's place we were saying goodbye to Ruslan, about to start his big adventure in the US, with only a shoulder bag and not a word of English. Since my holiday with Yelena I feel I've reached a new level of warmth with her mother, which is very nice indeed. She had never met Ruslan's friend Andrey, but I was interested to see the way the conversation developed. None of this: "What do you do, where do you live and isn't the Northern Line terrible?" He suddenly said he thought execution was preferable to loss of freedom, and she said she thought people needed constraints in order to be happy. He said that was the happiness of an animal, but she said no, if you've ever lived with an animal you see that their happiness is far greater than a human's. And so the evening progressed in a leisurely way, and underneath, quite sad. I kissed Ruslan goodbye and he was so startled and shy, I had the impression it was the first time anyone had kissed him for a long time.

I was tried *in absentia* today in Lambeth about my poll tax. They've never accepted that I left the country in January.

Friday 27 September

More lovely weather, and I'm beginning to catch up on my sleep. After a massage I went shopping and bought a beret for 75p. Spend, spend, spend all the way. Viktor rang, about to take his first trip abroad, to Finland, and asking what I would like as a present. Very nice! I said cheese.

Saturday 28 September

Professor Boris Nazarov from the Information Centre on Human Rights rang up, offering to help Amnesty with its registration. It seems we really are being nudged towards him. Perhaps it is because I am here on my own, but I do find the push of these unseen forces threatening and quite depressing.

The rest of the day was a long goodbye to Misha, who is on his way to Yugoslavia for two years. He seemed sad and said he had waited for this moment for six years, but somehow something didn't seem right. Everyone at the table was talking politics. Inflation is over 2% a week. People don't trust Yeltsin. Everything seems to be built on thin air and no one can guess what the future will be. I think I've been here too long, because I began an immensely "Russian" conversation with Natasha, about whether in real life good is more interesting than bad, as Simone Weil said. I was saved by her great interest in these kinds of things and the speed with which she forms her own opinions and disagrees.

It was the same crowd I first met in April, but it struck me how unhappy almost everyone looked: husbands and wives ignoring each other and a lot of drink. Natasha has got thin and seemed immensely tired. People seem to be grasping the chance to work or travel, and putting themselves through massive personal and family strains.

Sunday 29 September

The clocks moved back today, and I and everyone else had forgotten. Valya thought there'd been another coup when she switched on the radio and heard more classical music.

When I rang Irina to check on tonight's play and asked her what she'd been doing since we met, she said, "Thinking." I will definitely miss all this when I go home.

This weekend I saw a woman on the metro carrying a massive cardboard box, the size of a small cello case. She said it was full of cornflakes (!).

Monday 30 September

Bright fresh weather. I did a mailing to all our seminar participants who said they wanted to know more about Amnesty, and in turn got a nice letter from an Amnesty member who used to be in Donetsk and is now back home. She said that the French Section of Amnesty are wishing me well, which is nice to know.

The afternoon was my first visit to the CSCE human rights conference, and what a pleasant, civilised way it was to spend time. The draft concluding document is ready and there were five contributions about it, the USSR's bristling with proposals and suggestions. It is very hard to meet delegates without sticking your nose in their top pocket to read their label. I managed to deliver our death penalty materials to six of the USSR republican delegations.

Thence to meet Valya and Tolya to assess the final touches to the office. The tile flooring is just being grouted, but otherwise almost everything has been done. We decided we may have to take a day trip to Estonia to buy light shades. Valya suggested we also go to Parnu, where they sell good mittens. Today she'd met a woman who had a ticket to prove she is No. 503 in the queue for sugar. There have been no eggs around for about a month. Tonight's news said the firm which produces 90% of the total has no more hen feed. Today I managed to lay hands on my fourth pint of milk since 16 July. I couldn't get my laundry back because the factory had no hot water and it hadn't been done. My jeans are catching on the heels of my shoes in a very irritating way, and I realise it's because I've lost weight again.

Tuesday 1 October

We are having gorgeous weather. There's a warm air blowing on the breeze. Lydia Zapevalova came round in the morning, bringing beautiful roses, grapes and apples, and looking quite beautiful after all the stresses early in the year. When the coup was announced she was on her way back from visiting Andrey in prison. He was terrified his death sentence would be reinstated. Apparently the journal *Ogonyok* is running pieces about corruption in the Voronezh judicial system – the people who sentenced him to death.

After more meetings I had a very interesting massage with Tanya, who thinks my back is improving. Her adult son had come round yesterday and fallen asleep, then suddenly she had gone down with food poisoning. She threw up and threw up and still he slept. She was in such pain that she started crying, and still he slept. She was too weak to wake him up and barely made it to the kettle, before collapsing – and he slept on.

The way she told it made me laugh out loud.

As she was talking about things, I asked her if it was boring before perestroyka. "*Boring?*" she said with real feeling. "It was *so boring*. But it wasn't boredom. It was despair."

Wednesday 2 October

I tripped over the telephone wire tonight and yanked it and the computer out of the socket. After an hour of fiddling around, during which I lost the screw in my slipper, I managed to reconnect the phone, but not the electronic mail. Unfortunately instructions from the London office for tomorrow's CSCE meeting are on it.

Inflation is more than 100% in some places. When I came, the courier cost 30 roubles and this morning it was *360*. I didn't have enough money with me, so paid by credit card. No one could remember how to use the machine, so we waited twenty minutes for the manager and another ten while they discovered today's exchange rate, which turned out to be a fictional 10 roubles to the dollar. I

commented on it and they said, “Well, it’s our rate.” I said, “You mean everyone can invent their own?” They shrugged sympathetically: “It’s the Soviet Union.”

I called in on Irina’s library on my way home. Sitting under a dusty map with a picture of Lenin on the wall, she looked like a photo of the classic Soviet bureaucrat. I was amused that she had been thinking of my yellow towel that disappeared from my flat while I was in Siberia. She’s planning to lend me another one to hang up, so I can watch who looks guilty when they see it. She’s also found out the details of a sailing trip to Uglich for us. I was touched, because I am sure it’s not something she will enjoy, and that this is an indulgence for me planned by her and her mother.

Today I had a visit from Othmar, an Amnesty member from Austria, who wants to volunteer with me. The landlord came hot on his heels and, after listening to five minutes of our conversation, Othmar asked if I was here for Amnesty or with a business. I’m not surprised he was confused. Sasha engaged him in intense conversation about the Austrian schilling, then I stood up and rather firmly showed him out.

The post seems to have speeded up since the coup. Letters from the UK have been reaching me in two weeks instead of four to six.

Had a small triumph at 11.20pm. Finally made contact with Vyacheslav Bakhmin, who handles registration issues at national level, within the Russian Foreign Ministry. He has got ours in hand, is taking it to Yeltsin and expects an answer by the end of October. A nice boost, but the nicest things were his voice and whole attitude. A great weight off my mind.

Thursday 3 October

One of the interpreters at the CSCE conference accidentally leaned on his button and during the US delegate’s speech, everyone heard, “Of course, she hates to be hurt, but all alcoholics do…”

It was a real marathon today, until 8.30 at night. I had an extremely interesting talk with the Latvian delegation, who were finding their first CSCE a talk shop. They were relatively frank about prison problems in Latvia, about the death penalty and about alternative service for conscientious objectors. They said they’d copied European practice in making the length of alternative service punitive. I said a lot of European practice troubled us, and they said they could change it. I also enjoyed talks with the French and the Portuguese.

In the morning I was thinking I could quite enjoy life as a professional conference observer, but by the evening I was crawling the walls. I also had visitations from Soviets in trouble, including one man who was off his rocker, who talked with me for half an hour. I feel I’d be off my rocker if I’d been born and brought up here, and it

all seemed alright. Hearing some of the other stories though, I just wanted to run away.

Rows of Soviets in woolly hats with petitions in their hands sat in the foyer downstairs, while we floated up to deal with "human rights". I arranged to meet one woman tomorrow and she said uncomplainingly, "They let me in today, but if they don't tomorrow, will you please come out onto the street?" There seems to have been some intensive filtering going on: the French delegate said they'd only met ex-prisoners from camps or psychiatric hospitals – no conscientious objectors, or eviction cases, or national minorities. Vladimir Babenkov, the Foreign Ministry man responsible for access to the conference, came up to me and other non-governmental people, exuding relief at the end of the conference and wreathed in smiles: "Hello dear friends! Dear colleagues!…"

Moscow's a small place. Yesterday I bumped into Vladimir Alimov for the *fourth* time, and today saw a London University student I know, with a ring in his nose, crouching in an underpass with a man selling drums. Not to pass up an opportunity, I gave him some Amnesty leaflets to take to Armenia with him.

Friday 4 October

At the CSCE conference today a peasant woman was sitting on the balcony, under a chandelier, with a headset on under her headscarf and walking stick close at hand, listening to governments interpreting what they meant by "migrant workers". I wonder what she was thinking.

The meeting finished at 2.00pm then I went to renew my visa. I got a lift in a new car from a man who didn't seem to be able to drive. He forced it along in second, then changed up to third and immediately slowed down. We went the wrong way down a one-way street, then he reversed out into three lanes of traffic. There was a huge crowd at the Visa and Registration Department and I stood in a tight, hot queue for forty minutes, with the man behind poking his book into my back. I was ready to whap him.

I did so little today, but got back exhausted and went to bed at 6.00pm. Irina rang later. The boats to Uglich have great names: one's the *Felix Dzerzhinsky*, named after the first Bolshevik head of the secret police, and the other's the *Ivan Susanin*, named after the bloke who led some Poles to their deaths in the seventeenth century.

Saturday 5 October

Had a very interesting and social day. Irina and I went to the travel agency to suss out Uglich. No glossy brochures here, just some handwritten notices about "two rooms available in such-and-such a *pensionat*, between such-and-such dates", and a barking woman behind a glass screen. We had to fill out forms giving our professions

etc. I wrote, “Colleague of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs”, as it says on my visa, but as the moths have had a field day with my gloves and I looked like Albert Steptoe as I handed the form over, this probably looked like a bald and unconvincing narrative. We *queued* at two windows for pieces of paper, although we were the only people in the place, and came out with our “*putyovka*” – travel authorisation – for 14 October.

Then we went to look round the Andrey Rublev museum, the first time it’s been open in the four years I’ve tried to visit it. Irina told me about their Marxism-Leninism classes at university. One of the ‘best’ students became a priest straight afterwards and another, rather vacant, girl got top marks because the lecturer said she was “a Bolshevik by nature”. “And you, Irina”, he said, “say one thing and think another.” I do like her – she has her own opinions and is one of the few people who never asks me for anything.

I had lunch at Tanya’s. During the coup she’d spent the time talking to the tank drivers in the street, then gone home, cut up a blue suit and red skirt, and sewn Russian flags, which later departed from Moscow on some tanks.

I then met Natalya Vysotskaya and another lawyer who works on capital cases. Because it was cold, we sat in the foyer of *Izvestiya* and chatted. Natalya invited me home and when we got to the tube, she turned round to survey the people behind us and see if we were being followed. That some ordinary professional woman should do this so naturally really struck home. It has got to me, and I don’t like this part of living here.

I then had several hours getting to know the riddle that is she. She took me home via the church which she hopes to expand into a rehabilitation centre for ex-convicts. It was until recently a warehouse and tonight a service was going on in amongst the scaffolding, and there was an immensely good atmosphere. People had also brought bedding etc. for her ex-prisoners. She’s totally dedicated to her project, an immensely good lobbyist, and immensely hard working. When we got home she put on old blues numbers and told me about her life before she became religious.

Izvestiya says an amnesty is being prepared for army deserters.

Sunday 6 October

The lovely weather continues. Today was the day of unhappy families.

I took corrections to the Peru translation down to the Teplitskys. There was an atmosphere you could cut with a knife: all three of them sitting in separate rooms, the tension brought on by Lena’s Turgenev homework. Natasha says she’ll give it two more weeks then is going to do something about it. Poor Lena was fed up to death and fighting

tears because she couldn't do her essay.

I think Soviet newsreaders are going through a reaction to the coup and the mechanical way the readers behaved then. They're full of comments and asides about the world at large and the news they are reading. One woman interviewer was so full of tragedy and sighing when she introduced the subject of deaths in the army that I think the guests were quite reluctant to say anything in case they intruded upon her grief. It got worse when it turned out the actress she was featuring next had been widowed that day.

Monday 7 October

The oddest public holiday today: to celebrate Brezhnev's Constitution. I suppose there isn't a Constitution at the moment so they can't celebrate that.

By midday I saw a guy with a shopping bag trying to negotiate the corner of a building like a vaudeville drunk. He had even more trouble with a puddle. The other night I saw a drunk trying to pee up against a wall, holding his shopping bag in front of him.

I managed to shake myself out of the lethargy which has been threatening. In the remaining weeks while our registration is on ice, I think I should systematise our death penalty mailing lists and also introduce Amnesty at all the republican embassies in Moscow.

A Japanese student at Moscow Law Faculty came round to visit in the morning and immediately arranged ways to promote Amnesty at the university. She'd been at our death penalty seminar but unfortunately leaves on 26 October. She said she was only sorry we hadn't met earlier. Me too.

Another person at the seminar wrote me the nicest letter, giving the phone numbers of about twenty people who were in the now-defunct Society to Abolish the Death Penalty. I began to ring them up for their addresses, and despite my odd introduction – "Hello, I'm ringing about the death penalty" – the reaction was universally interested and warm.

Tuesday 8 October

Delightful weather continues. I spent the morning trying to find the official in the Russian government who could give Amnesty the list of death sentences commuted in September. I thought, *Why not try the intimidating woman at the Statistics Department in the USSR Ministry of Justice?*, and sure enough, her defences were down and she was quite maternal to me. Got some numbers from her and short shrift from the people at the other end of them.

Tanya gave me another good massage. I wonder what the neighbours think: she speaks at the top of her voice, there's slapping and the occasional shout from me. She's an immense sensualist and takes a childlike pleasure in anything that looks, sounds, or smells

nice: a bar of soap, flowers, the sound of church bells.

I revised the translation of our Peru document, then composed a letter to Pink Floyd for Vladimir Alimov. All in a day's work.

Wednesday 9 October

It was touch and go how this complicated day would work out, but it did. In the morning I managed to fix an appointment with the President of the Russian Clemency Commission. He said they don't give out lists of people who have been pardoned. I said we just wanted to spare him from being bombarded by superfluous appeals. He laughed and said, "Well, OK."

Nina Petrovna Lisovskaya came round with Pavlo Kampov, bearing flowers and fruit from Ukraine and here to collect his long-suffering computer. It was very satisfying to see the immense pleasure it gave him, to bring the whole saga to an end – and to have four fewer boxes in the room.

I then dashed to *Megapolis Express* to do an interview with a very nice, un-Russian sort of woman. She looked as though she might be called Pauline or Christine. Five women worked in the room and one man, but the walls were plastered with pin-ups.

Got back half an hour late to meet Vera Millinship and take her walking round the Kolomenskoye monastery, but I needn't have worried; it had taken her two hours to travel the equivalent of four tube stops, because she couldn't find petrol for the car. It's a funny thing this being late. I find I'm doing it all the time here, perhaps because you always have to walk further than you think.

To crown it all I got the wrong bus at night, so arrived panting for the piano concert at the Stanislavsky museum with Yelena's mother. She excused me because she remembered I'm "always late". It happened to be the seventh anniversary of Yelena's trial. Her mother remembered she'd got a surprise call from the KGB saying Yelena wanted a blue dress for her court appearance.

Yelena's mother really is the unsung heroine of all this. She supports Yelena down to the ground and takes in all her waifs and strays, some of whom live with her for two months at a time. She said of one woman, "It would have been alright if she didn't talk." She told me people from the House of Architects want to make a sign for our office and also a "symbolic" arrangement of dried flowers. These nice gestures are the most satisfying thing about this job.

At 10.00pm I met Anne-Marie, visiting pollution hot spots in her new ecology job. It's the first time we've seen each other in a year and we stayed up late, drinking and smoking.

Thursday 10 October

"*Svyatye mesta pustye ne byvayut*", as they say here, and the place of Oleg and Ruslan seems to have been taken by the very nice Andrey.

He brought me some lovely wooden spoons, then we stayed on chatting and had an ice cream. Another reasonable and low-key man living on the fringes.

In the afternoon I went to the Democratic Russia Party to see if their bookshop would be interested in carrying our death penalty report. I think they were, but suspected I'd stolen the books. They'll decide tomorrow. I also met up with Natalya Vysotskaya, who'd just addressed a congress of businessmen, hoping some would help to sponsor her prisoner fund, but hit a brick wall. All her frustration boiled down to the fact that they were sloppy, there was dirt everywhere, and "they all had things sticking out of their pockets". She despairs if they are the only challenge to the old order.

At 6.00pm I had my appointment with Nikolay Vedernikov, the head of the Russian Clemency Commission. The Parliament building looks nice inside, and the offices and signs look businesslike, rather than pompous. Downstairs they had an exhibition of children's art, depicting Lithuania in January and Moscow in August. There does seem to be life in the place.

Vedernikov is a criminology professor from Tomsk University, but if Tomsk has been a closed city, he seems quite an open man. On his recent trip to the USA he especially asked to meet Amnesty people in Washington; he has just ushered through the first large group of commutations on capital cases; and he gave me the unpublished list of their names on trust. However, the Clemency Commission itself seems to leave a lot to be desired: its members are picked at random, have no criteria to work by, and someone who works on it told me most members don't read the case material. They just listen to the presentations and vote on the nod.

Friday 11 October

Had an interesting evening watching TV. There was *Come Dancing* from St Petersburg, with a line of adverts for carpenters and plumbers continually running across the bottom of it. One advert was for a computer firm called "Arse".

Then there was a TV doctor answering readers' letters – absolutely amazing letters and amazing replies. After a crop of questions from people with bad legs and backs, he read out letters from insomniacs and they were terrifying: one woman was so afraid of a famine she couldn't sleep. Another had seen a war invalid attacked in a queue because he was taking time over choosing a small piece of meat, and now she was too frightened to go shopping and also couldn't sleep. The doctor explained it as "situational neurosis" and got himself more and more worked up as he described the political scene, ending with quotations from non-democratic politicians, which he happened to have brought with him. After reading out something

by Zhirinovsky, he said, “I’d make him have psychiatric tests if it was up to me.” So, cold comfort for the people who couldn’t sleep.

I, however, could hardly stay awake all day and went to bed at 4.00pm. I wonder if it’s massage that brings it on. Tanya walked me to the tube, slapping me to make me straighten my back. I had a very interesting lunch with one of the people I had phoned about the death penalty. He turned out to be in the navy and a young judge on a military tribunal, training other judges. He was very intelligent and very interested in Amnesty. He’s also pretty brave. When the coup was announced, his institute decided on loyalty to the coup committee, but to give institute employees the opportunity to resign. He had collected Yeltsin’s statement from the Russian Parliament and was suddenly hit by terror as he began to distribute it at the institute. He heard the underground radio’s call for all able-bodied men to defend the White House and went there on the Tuesday night. When the firing started he and his wife kissed each other goodbye. He laughed at it all in hindsight, but the terror must have been real.

A very nice phone call from Andrey today, offering to give me a blanket, as the heating hasn’t come on in my flat. Theirs has been on since the end of August (!). According to Mr Kostanov at Moscow Soviet Justice Department, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister has given his blessing to register Amnesty. Various papers are supposed to be trundling back and forth in the post.

Managed to buy myself a pair of felt boots for winter today, for less than £1.

Saturday 12 October

Deep fog. Up by six and out of the house by 8.00am to buy tickets for Leningrad next weekend, which I managed to do in ten minutes, beating the queue. There were eggs in the peasants’ market! Fifteen roubles for ten – not bad. As I nursed them home on a crowded bus, several people asked me where I got them from. Given the continuing general dearth, that really does seem to be “the market” working.

The fog cleared and it was a lovely day, which I spent sleeping and working in the evening. I made the chilling discovery that a thief *has* been in my flat. A bowl I kept on a high shelf with some donations in it was empty. Bad feeling.

Sunday 13 October

There was a great dividing-up of cabbages today from the back of a lorry in the middle of our courtyard. I don’t know how people knew about it, but they were all there, loading them into the back of their cars.

I cooked my first half-decent meal today: fried carp, potatoes and some nice salads, including my first cauliflower in *smetana* and honey, for US friends who were coming to lunch. Tanya Smith is a very

smiling person, which makes a refreshing change here.

The Quaker meeting was excellent, the ministry being on "forgiveness". Somehow we seem to be hanging together better as a group, despite all our differences. We were visited by a US electrician from Minnesota, who had been repairing the electrics in a Russian monastery. Very nice man. I brought Nikolay back to give him some eggs and we had a very good, deep talk.

Monday 14–Wednesday 16 October:

The Trip to Uglich

This was my boat trip with Irina up the Moscow River and into the Volga to visit the ancient town of Uglich, where one of the Tsarevich's sons was murdered. We seemed to spend a lot of time in canal locks and almost every time we looked out of a window we saw a wall. Uglich itself was a poor Soviet town in the drizzle, with dusk falling. One shop was selling apple slices covered in flies for 2.60 roubles a kilo. Irina got immensely depressed by it and annoyed by my cheerfulness, which she said showed I have "a reserve of my own life somewhere else". Yes, but I also get irritatingly cheerful when I can sense someone else's spirits failing. I also noticed that Irina cannot bear the average aggression of Soviet officials, from the booking clerk to the waitress. It must be a dreadful handicap and torture for someone brought up here. It usually makes me want to fight, but it seems to make her want to run away. She's the only Soviet I know like that.

We had brought our own food and had a very nice lazy time, living in a cabin the size of a cupboard. When we bit into our hard-boiled eggs at the first breakfast we both stopped and looked at each other; it was so nice to eat an egg again. Irina said, "It was high time to have an egg."

All was well until I got home and found the bottom lock had jammed and I couldn't get into the flat. Aleksey from No. 36 was wonderful. Although he had just been getting into the bath, he came and stood on the cold landing for two hours, trying to fiddle the lock, and finally cutting it open with an axe. He then mended it for me, and wouldn't accept anything in exchange. The house cat darted in and dashed around my kitchen – and it was curtains for mousey. So, an unexpected boon.

Aleksey told me what he had done during the coup. He'd heard that Yelena Bonner had been on Radio Liberty already, so by some strange instinct he went to Chkalov Street, but realised he didn't know which flat she lived in, so just stood there, hoping to see her. Tanks were already rolling up the ring road, but he noticed they were all stopping when the lights were red. A law-based society indeed. He went up to defend the White House, and said that from the tension his

legs were simply exhausted, as though he'd walked a hundred miles. I remember I thought I'd got an ulcer.

Thursday 17 October

Othmar came to take the mail again, looking lonely and down in the mouth after his first month here without a word of Russian. He'd spent three hours trying to find the post office last week. You forget how hard all these things are without the language.

Tolya and I looked round the completed office, making a list of doors that jammed and two windows that leak, which we'll get done before we make the final payment. He's going to cook dinner for all the workmen tomorrow night, and advises me to buy them all small presents. Part of me rebels at this cringing servility to the builders, but he wants to keep in with them in case we need future repairs, and his judgement is usually right.

Today, amongst other things, I gave my first English conversation class – to Anna Yevgenievna Bochko, the woman who defended Andrey Zapevalov on appeal. Her English was good and I enjoyed my first experience of teaching. I also learned what may be the real reason that his death sentence was commuted. One of the members of the USSR Clemency Commission was taught law by Anna's grandmother, so some telephone calls were made and the whole Commission read her appeal thoroughly. However, I must say it was a very good one. Anna was perfectly frank and illusion-free about the patronage system here.

Today I saw a carton of milk half-spilled in the street and seriously thought about picking it up and taking it home. Odd the effect living here has.

I've got to think about going home to the UK. Various people are making nice noises about me staying on here, but underneath it all I am always very aware that I am foreign and looked on like that – from Natalya Vysotskaya's outburst after the coup, to Irina's in Uglich about my "life in reserve". But what kind of a life? It is a very curious thing, but in ten months I haven't actually been homesick for the UK once. In June I suddenly wanted to sail down the Thames to Kew; I got a pang at the Henry Moore Exhibition when I saw that one of the exhibits came from Wakefield Art Gallery (although why, I don't know, as I've never actually been to Wakefield); then the other day I thought I would quite like to eat an avocado pear and a banana, which I could do in the UK.

But other than that, Britain seems from this distance a strangely closed society that has no sense of direction. When you hear about the last outburst of riots in Newcastle, you feel the different people involved and commenting on it actually have no experience in common at all. Here, although opinions are massively divided, people

are facing the same things: how to cope with the break-up of the country; how to avert hunger; how to understand their history.

I learned yesterday that Lambeth cashed my cheque for the so-called arrears in my poll tax, then sent me another court summons for the same amount, plus two more months that I've been living here.

Friday 18 October

In the evening Tolya gave his party for the workmen. It was like *Boys from the Blackstuff*, Soviet-style. They presented me with a bunch of red carnations, then all got excruciatingly embarrassed in the presence of this foreign woman, fell silent, and one by one left the room for a smoke. Tolya had made wonderful food and had just the right manner to hold the group together. During the coup the builders had worked solidly on the office, not knowing if their firm would get the chop (as they're a cooperative), or if Amnesty would too. At night they'd gone to the barricades.

At my wits' end about what to take to Leningrad this weekend as presents, I went into the new Irish supermarket on the Novy Arbat, and nice it was too. There are a number of nice clothes shops opening on that street and although the prices are probably ridiculous, it is a real pleasure on the eye to see a shop window that is full and attractively laid out. Andrey came round, bringing me a blanket for my freezing flat. At 11.40pm I managed to trap down Vyacheslav Bakhmin at a party and ask him about Amnesty's registration. He still hasn't sent his letter about us to Yeltsin. And so we climb onto another ladder of delays.

The Economic Union was signed today.

Saturday 19 October

Before I caught the Leningrad train at lunch I visited Viktor, partly to ask if he will be a consultant to the Council of Europe's human rights project here.

Today they changed the tape on the metro to match the new station names. People were chuckling as they heard "Alexandrovsky Gardens" instead of "Kalinin", and "Clean Ponds" instead of "Kirov". Then an old woman turned to me in panic and asked, "Is there a Prospekt Marx station?" I said we'd passed it and it was now "Hunters' Row". Another woman started raging that everything is changing for the worse.

Tatyana and I were going to Leningrad to meet a man who wants to join the Quakers. He came to meet us off the train, then I went to stay at Ludmilla's. The shop signs on her street were all illuminated and once again St Petersburg looked more prosperous than Moscow.

Sunday 20 October

A marvellous conversation with Boris Sudaryshkin, who seemed to be thirsting for religious talk. Then Tatyana and I parted company

and I went for a sauna with Lyuda. We took the metro to the north, crossed the main road, and were suddenly out in the country amongst *dachas*. The sauna was in a hut by a lake, and as it was moonlight we all raced out and leapt into the freezing lake. The secret is to cover your head with water so that your body is all one temperature, and that way you don't feel cold. Walking back to the sauna you feel high and terrific.

Monday 21 October

Anne-Marie was in St Petersburg today, finishing her tour of pollution hotspots. She'd been in Kiev when the Chernobyl reactor caught fire, so had just closed the window and pulled the blanket over her head. Sounds like British civil defence. I had lunch with her Soviet mother-in-law, then we all took Anne-Marie to the airport.

In the afternoon I was to speak to Lyuda's Faculty of English teachers, about forty of them. I must have overdone the bit about "fighting for your rights", because when I left they voted to go on strike if their hours are not cut – Lyuda too. There was a surprising amount of interest in Amnesty, especially from the teachers in the Law Department, and they asked me to come and speak to their students.

The overnight train to Moscow was lovely – much warmer than my flat. Two women next to me were talking quietly in Georgian and I could hear Whitney Houston's 'Saving All My Love for You' floating in and out over the sound of the wheels. The woman on the top bunk seemed to be some kind of an athlete, and bounded up to her bunk in one graceful movement. Lovely sleep.

Tuesday 22 October

I spent the day working at home. It is now very cold and the heating still has not come on in the flat. I had to queue for twenty minutes out in the street for bread. The temperature was +8 degrees and by night-time I was feeling ill. I heard later there was a demonstration for bread in the Manezh Square at night.

I spent the evening translating Tatyana's article about the "Three Dimensions of Russia", rather a philosophical piece, then went to Aleksey at No. 36, to help him with some English. His mother-in-law was going to bed early because she knew she would have to get up to queue for sugar next day. He was translating *The Desperate Donnegans* and it was full of things like, "He's the best yellow-leg ever to have forked a McCall." We were both sitting poring over an American dictionary, but it didn't really help much.

Today Andrey called, worried that I might not be able to renew my visa, and so inviting me to talk about it with Sergey Grigoryants, the head of *Glasnost* journal, who would be prepared to kick up a fuss if necessary. He very nicely said, "We are not indifferent to who represents Amnesty." Praise indeed.

Wednesday 23 October

I had a lunch appointment with the TV programme, *The Law and Us*, and was scared stiff all morning. However, it turned out to be a chat over coffee with Sasha Senatorov, the long-haired interviewer. I interested them in doing a programme for Human Rights Day on 10 December. In the afternoon I started my rounds of visiting the various republican embassies in Moscow, beginning with the embassy of Kyrgyzstan. At first the guy couldn't seem to understand why I was there, and it did seem to be a bit of a liberty, but I showed him our correspondence with the President and we got talking about the death penalty for fifty minutes, and I think a quite good first contact was made. I wonder if one day Amnesty will simply be a natural part of the horizon there.

In the evening Irina and I went to a concert of choral music at the Stanislavsky Museum. It was very esoteric – fourteenth-century Greek Orthodox songs – but well done and very beautiful. Everyone there was in glasses, so I suppose it was the Moscow intelligentsia at play, "smelling of onions", as Irina pointed out. However, the audience all started bickering about whether to have the window open or not and this argument smouldered right through the fourteenth-century songs. Snow today.

Thursday 24 October

A cold wet day, which I spent working at home. I had a visit from Igor of the Krasnodar abolitionist group, who asked if I would speak to them about the death penalty. They sound a very mystical and rather interesting group.

I gave my second English class to Anna Bochko, getting her to choose five items out of twenty and explain why she would take them to a desert island. We then had an official phone conversation about trying to buy a flat, and I was very amused that after five minutes she tried to bribe me. She was most put out to find that wasn't "normal" practice. I asked her about registering Amnesty, and she immediately called a professor at Moscow University, who specialises in registration law, to help me. What struck me most was her tone of voice on the phone. It was the same cheerful, wheedling and slightly flirtatious tone that I've heard Ludmilla and Natalya Vysotskaya use. Obviously what you need "to get on" as a woman here.

Friday 25 October

The heating is on. I'm still fighting some bug and feel peculiar. The TV crew came round and filmed me in my kitchen. It's very difficult to convey the complexities of Amnesty's position and conquer all the complexities of the Russian language at the same time, and to outsiders it must seem that I'm wrestling with some invisible angel.

Saturday 26 October

I've been holding the boxes of material for the Moscow Amnesty group in my flat for one month and ten days. Nikolay was supposed to organise a taxi to collect them today, but was "unable to get a taxi", so was proposing to collect just two boxes with a friend. I went out and got a taxi, and loaded the whole lot to await his arrival. He took the whole lot to another group member, who then rang to complain that the material was not suitable for their exhibition. If they'd collected the whole lot a month ago when they first said they would, they would have known in good time.

In the evening I went to Vitaly and Gaby's spectacular wedding feast. I think I'm a bit of a "wedding general" here as Amnesty's representative; everyone's pleased to have me on their guest list. From there I went to a jazz concert with Irina, at the Children's Cinema at Paveletsky Station. It was packed with devotees and after some indifferent Soviet jazz guitar we were suddenly addressed by the brother of Irina's stepfather, wearing a snazzy jacket, and showing rare clips of US jazz. Marvellous rare film of Thelonius Monk and Billie Holliday.

In the morning I trudged off in the snow to Anna Bochko's legal consultancy to meet Professor Gamlet Avetisyan and to hear the horrible truth about the registration steps we must go through. It looks like it will take forever.

Sunday 27 October

I had a visit from a stringer from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, here to investigate the gay scene. In the afternoon I began to feel as though I've been here too long. I finished translating an article and got increasingly irritated by the profusion of adjectives and accumulation of clauses, like Russian's growing all over you. There seems to be graphomania and wordomania here and it would be lovely to have some peace and quiet.

In the evening the feeling was accentuated at the Quakers, when someone started laying down the law after the meeting about, of all things, life after death. I went and cleaned my boots, as I'd stood in eighteen inches of muck on the way there. I'm writing this by candlelight as my kitchen bulb's gone.

Monday 28 October

There were inches of ice on a wire fence today, as though it was embedded in a milk bottle. Then it snowed and it was quite cosy inside, writing up my report on the last four months here. Taxi drivers had a strike today and blocked the main ring road, which caused chaos. Another driver has been murdered and they want more protection.

At midday I was to meet an Armenian, whose relative is an entrepreneur imprisoned on a corruption charge. The Armenian

arrived in a Mercedes Benz and gave me a lift to the British Airways office to pick up my plane ticket. There I also bought a film – and got my change in chewing gum.

A funny thing: I renewed my newspaper subscriptions today and only after I'd done it, realised I'd ordered them until March 1992. I'm supposed to be going home in January. Maybe it's my deep subconscious speaking.

Three superficial and disconnected impressions. Gorbachev looks one hell of a lot better since the coup: he seemed to be a hostage a long time before it. Another thing that struck me was an odd festival of clowns on TV the other week, all arranged on the initiative of one young woman. They asked her why she'd done it and she didn't really know. She said, "I suppose the clowns need it." The purposelessness was quite refreshing, and a new thing in public life here. Lastly, the local bread shop was closed for a day in mourning for Igor Talkov, the Leningrad singer who was murdered at a concert. The sign said, "In Russian hearts his memory will never die." This "Russian" stuff is creeping in everywhere and has lots of overtones I don't like. I feel some of the Quakers are doing it too. When we were having our photo taken the other night, someone said, "All the Russian Quakers and Marjorie." This commitment to Mother Russia in her time of need is very close to the Soviet idea of the nation state. Both sides think anyone who leaves is betraying the country.

At night I had a lovely relaxing time at Yelena's place, eating tons of food and celebrating their first wedding anniversary. The conversation was very interesting and we stayed till past midnight. I couldn't believe it was only a year ago that I'd been at their wedding party. They said it was because I'd had such a difficult year, and they said it so nicely and with such implicit understanding, that it was a great help. I realised I know almost everyone they were talking about. It is a very close-knit world, and presumably everything I do must also get round like wildfire.

I met a woman in the lift when I came back from the post office with letters in my hand. She asked if I was delivering the mail, then looked at me more closely and said, "No, you must be the neighbour. I've seen your picture in the papers."

Tuesday 29 October

What a day. The landlord came round first thing and we ended up having a terrific scene. He was wanting to raise my rent to £200 a month (from £80), and I think was meaning to "negotiate" with me, but immediately went over the top and threatened to throw me out in December if I didn't pay. I started listing the things that didn't work in the flat (oven, fridge, iron etc.) and particularly the door lock. Although it would only cost him 50 roubles and is in his own interest,

he refuses point blank to do anything about it. By this time we were shouting at each other. I then played as dirty as he, and asked if he really wanted to have my rent waiting for him in London when he's over there in November. It was ridiculous; he was threatening to throw me out and I was threatening to give him no money, and all over what? Tolya walked in in the middle of this and began to offer some suggestions where you could buy good cheap locks. "Don't stick your nose in other people's business," Sasha said.

In the last few months I've had my phone tapped, my mail read, received a threatening letter, lived through a coup, been robbed, summoned to court twice in London and threatened with eviction. Things aren't looking too bright.

Later in the day I had to see Alexander Khlopyanov at the USSR Foreign Ministry. He arrived in a black leather coat and fedora hat, looking very debonair, and sent me for coffee while he got me a re-entry visa for November. This is the first time I've been allowed to "re-enter", which I suppose is a positive sign. Andrey Grachev was behind me in the coffee queue – formerly in the Communist Party Central Committee and now in Gorbachev's Press Council, I believe. Khlopyanov shook hands with him on his way to me.

I had to take this authorisation to the Visa and Registration Department, where they asked me to hand over my passport and visa and collect them tomorrow. As I actually fly at midday tomorrow and their office is shut all day, I did this with a helpless sinking feeling.

Yesterday's Parliament session was apparently a landmark. Yeltsin is to take direct charge because of the crisis situation (*plus ça change*), and consumer prices and wages are to be "liberalised". It sounds like whacking inflation ahead.

I had the usual procession of people bringing mail to post as I tried to write up my accounts until 11.00pm. I'm so weary I could hardly concentrate, or physically keep myself seated. Tolya rang, suggesting two flats I could move to, and telling me not to worry. In an odd way I'm not worrying at all. Irina rang and said she had a gift for me. She finds the current economic lingo odd. She feels we are living in a huge bog with nothing to buy, so what is there to "liberalise"?

Earlier in the day I had to meet someone for the first time. I went up to a guy who fitted the description and asked if he was from the Crimea. He thought I asked him if he was from the KGB. Both of us found it very funny. It wasn't him.

Wednesday 30 October

Minus three degrees and very slippery on the street outside. But tomorrow really is another day, and today I had one stroke of luck after another. I managed to get my way into the Visa and Registration

Department, although it was shut, and a nice smiling woman prepared my new visa. I got taxis there and back with no problem, and managed to book a taxi to the airport with no difficulty at all. At the airport I found a luggage trolley just standing there, unattended, and also a vacant seat. Fell asleep.

Before I left too, the landlord rang and asked if I would forgive him. I said yes, we hadn't understood each other. I think it takes something to ring up like that and I appreciated it. Irina came round and saw me off. Her gift was a lemon, one of the first lemons she had been able to afford for over a year. It was an immensely nice thing to give me, but I realise I'm making my cultural shift in preparation for going back home, and part of me was amused. How very *difficult* this is for all of us. My present to her was a disposable syringe for her dental operation, which, when you come to think of it, is just as peculiar.

I seemed to be on the ventriloquists' flight home. The boarding sign at the airport said GA 873. Yesterday Khasbulatov was made Chair of the Russian Supreme Soviet. That seems to be the point where I came in. Time to go home.

THE LAST LAP: NOVEMBER 1991–MARCH 1992

Monday 18 November

British Airways lost my luggage, so I got home late. Had a bath and watched a slow tide of cockroaches crawling up the walls. The wild patterning of my wallpaper and the kitchen floor leapt out at me this time when I walked into the flat. Glad to find nothing had been stolen.

Tuesday 19 November

I've the feeling this will be a tough time and so am taking things softly-softly, in particular sleeping whenever I feel like it. In the morning I laid out my cockroach killer and fly poisons, and in the afternoon I shopped for food. It was twilight at 3.00pm and there was a crowd of dark shapes queuing outside the booze shop and outside the milk shop too. I was shocked by the prices at the market. A jar of *smetana* that was 15 roubles in January is now 70. A tiny chicken is 50. According to *Izvestiya*, Yeltsin is "freeing" retail prices and wages next. Piyasheva, who heads the Prices Committee, then plans to free wholesale prices and distribution prices all in the space of two months. It is quite frightening.

I took eggs to Irina and her mother in the evening, but someone slammed a metro door on them and they broke. Natalya Ivanovna said that previously they had not wanted to take part in the hurly-burly of the outside world, but now they had no idea how to. I have never seen her so depressed – no longer the statuesque, animated woman of previous meetings. They must be on a combined income of about 360 roubles (under £10). Their favourite sausage which was 11 roubles in January is now 150. On my way home an old man in the metro began criticising my boots and said they were fit for an eighty-year-old. He was a cobbler and wanted to see how my zips worked. I said they worked perfectly fine, thank you very much.

There is a very noticeable change even in the two and a half weeks I've been away. The inflation is disturbing and I would say the atmosphere is suppressed panic. I now wonder if Amnesty can develop here. It seems too much to expect of people.

Terry Waite was freed today, and Shevardnadze is once again USSR Foreign Minister.

Wednesday 20 November

I swept up the corpses of cockroaches and flies which are succumbing to my poisonous vapours, then spent the day answering letters. Nikolay was round and says his mum is still mixing with

Marxist groups and is in the committee to keep Lenin in his tomb. To a Westerner it sounds like a mix-up of generations. She sent me some bread.

I collected my luggage from British Airways. Learned in the evening that Yelena had a daughter last night, so far anonymous, but bang on time.

Thursday 21 November

I've been hiding from the phone in case it was my landlord, but today he caught up with me and came round. To my very great surprise, however, I seem to have won that round, because he will let me stay until the end of January at the old rent and also started to mend my door lock. In fact, I feel so shocked by the prices now that I was on the point of offering him a much higher rent. He is not a bad man, but terribly intimidated by the West and I think that's why he acts so tough. I personally think he *is* mean though.

In the evening I walked down to the hard currency shop to buy light bulbs for the office. In an underpass that was almost pitch black a small brass ensemble were playing Latin American numbers, and an appreciative crowd was listening. The band were in their cloth caps and working togs, with big chapped hands, but they had obviously practised their routines and were extremely good. It was like a scene from the Weimar Republic. I felt that wrench of emotions: I love the place and it also frightens me.

I woke up in the small hours with a brilliant light shining in my face. It was the moon, looking like a stadium spotlight for some reason. I lay and watched night turn into day, and thought I had a sudden illumination about Shevardnadze. It could really be that he has been acting in agreement with Gorbachev all along. When he resigned in December it was possibly because both of them anticipated a rightward lurch, and Shevardnadze would be a free agent ready to attract all the perestroyka forces if anything happened to Gorbachev. Now he's back in the USSR Foreign Ministry I think it's because the "Gorbachev line" is best served within the system now and not outside it. I don't see it as a manoeuvre against Yeltsin so much as a clear line of communication to the outside world – that outside world including Kazakhstan, Ukraine and other republics.

Friday 22 November

The landlord's father-in-law, Arseny Panteleevich, came round to mend the lock but got his key stuck in the inside of it and went away again. He seemed nice – an ex-fireman.

In the afternoon I stood in a queue for four hours and twenty minutes to get a plane ticket for Kazakhstan in December. It absolutely did me in. Had dinner with someone from the UK I was meeting for the first time, who is out here looking for jobs. I have

increasing difficulty being lightly sociable and I could see the bubble going out of her as she got down to my level. Being here is playing up my serious side no end.

There is now a cross where Sverdlov's statue stood, dedicated to the "Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, Anarchists and others who died in 1917 fighting against Bolshevism".

Last night's *Fifth Wheel* was an excellent tour of US Midwest towns, seeing "how ordinary Americans live". It was all white and all Anglo-Saxon Protestant, but the team had been quite thorough, looking at farming, commerce, the family, the Sunday etc. The Americans were all very at ease with the camera, laughed a lot, and to some extent were in their element, showing off their microwaves and furnishings, and talking about their "job skills". A lot of them said the Union flag makes them cry. It occurred to me that if the Soviet crew asked them why they worked so fantastically hard, spent so long on the phone, were divorced etc. they would possibly have been equally in their element saying how rotten their lives were.

The TV showed all the goods without comment and the implication was that they were there to be admired and envied – but I wonder if either the crew or the viewers had such an uncomplicated reaction. The only time the interviewer sparked into life was when she spoke to an old man who trained horses, played the organ, and said love was the most important thing in his life. She asked him, "Why do we exist?", and he said, "I don't know", after some thought and with a laugh.

I don't think Russia will attain a free market economy and at some crucial level, I don't think it will want to. Those Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and Anarchists are all too recent and real.

Saturday 23 November

Irina had bought us tickets to hear Mikhail Pletnyov play and conduct Mozart piano concertos in the afternoon. A lovely concert. She had fallen down a hole running for the tram on Thursday and must have hit the ground at 100mph, because one leather glove was shredded, her right knee was gashed and she had to have her left leg x-rayed and it was all bandaged up.

There was a strange woman at the concert with her head all in a bandage like a helmet, sitting with her feet on a bag of rope and writing copiously the minute the music started. We decided she was either the music correspondent for *Soviet Culture*, or writing to Amnesty and that I'd get the letter in a couple of days.

There were 150 people in the queue outside the milk shop today.

Sunday 24 November

I met Simon Cosgrove for lunch and liked him immensely. He's

here researching the journal *Nash Sovremennik* and has just spent three years teaching in Zimbabwe. We had very similar views on Britain and it made it more interesting to discuss the USSR.

I also looked round a new two-roomed flat at Gagarin Square and decided I'll take it after January, if I'm still here. It had a big main room and was all wooden – no wild wallpapers. They are also keen to give me bed linen and an iron, and the fridge works. All for £110 a month. It belongs to Tolya's ex-wife and her new husband, both of them in ballet. I asked if they thought Russians want a free market economy and they said no. She later said, "I don't like Russian people." After we'd talked politics for two hours she said she didn't think women should be involved in politics because it gives them wrinkles, looking at me. These childlike personal remarks are quite funny, because they're so thinly veiled, you'd have to be an idiot not to get the point.

Then it was the Quaker meeting, with a Soviet feminist present and visiting US Quakers on their first trip to the USSR, but nevertheless giving advice on how to handle a second *coup d'état*. We spent a long time talking about all the compromises people made in order to succeed in Soviet society, when almost everything we said could have applied to the UK or the US, where a cocoon of untruth and self-deception also seems to prevail to my mind. One of them said, "A lot of forgiveness is needed now", which I discovered later that Nikolay agreed with. But I thought, *How do you "forgive" someone for having a car, nice flat and trips abroad when they've still got them and you still haven't?* I think a lot of justice is also needed.

The late-night newsreader ended the broadcast with a card trick! In the night a cockroach scurried over my face in bed.

Monday 25 November

I was tied to the house all day, waiting for a DHL courier who didn't come. Andrey called, out of his sick bed, to say he'd seen me on TV in *The Law and Us*. He said the kitchen towel didn't show. I'd been worried that there was a dirty kitchen towel hanging behind my head throughout.

Tolya came round straight from work, looking exhausted and twitching a lot. He says the only way he can make ends meet is to move out of his flat with his son, and let it to foreigners. He has nowhere to live though. I also spoke on the phone to Nikolay's mum, who sounded very low and finds the current situation utterly depressing. Last thing at night, though, I spoke to Tanya the masseuse, who is over the moon that you can now privatise your apartment at a flat rate of 250 roubles. She said, "This is a huge step forward." And so to bed.

Tuesday 26 November

I called Alexander Khlopyanov about extending my visa and he said, “A sacred task – it’ll be done immediately.” I have to say he’s a very good diplomat: whatever the prevailing winds, he conveys them with consistent smoothness.

I spent an odd morning at the Human Rights Division of the Foreign Ministry, where I had been invited by a young attaché who has applied for a job with Amnesty in London and wants to know if he will be called for interview. He was solicitous about our registration, but I did not totally play along and told him we found the USSR Foreign Ministry’s position rather difficult to understand.

His place was taken at the coffee table by Oleg Malginov, the First Secretary, also looking for new jobs, and wanting Amnesty’s help with a new non-governmental organisation he is setting up. He then asked me how they should go about registering it, which felt like pure mockery. I suppose he was trying to be very friendly when he started to “ty” me. I was thinking I wouldn’t mind a bit more respect. The coffee cups all had “Russia” on them, and I asked if they reflected the current situation. The woman serving the coffee suddenly laughed.

On the Arbat a middle-aged woman in woolly hat and old boots was playing the accordion and singing an old Communist song in a lovely contralto. It sounded very natural and unforced, and I gave her a lot of money.

Good Evening Moscow is a great current affairs programme. There was an item on some slums, where the woman reporter managed to be very funny but totally on the side of the slum dwellers. One woman’s flat had caught fire, but when she rang the housing department they said, “What’s it got to do with us? We didn’t set fire to it.” Some people had had no hot water for years. Others had had 18” of boiling water in their basement for over twenty years. The reporter ended with: “People complain when they’ve no hot water and they complain when they have hot water. Why are they not satisfied?” Programmes like that in the UK tend to be very pro forma and dull.

Natasha Teplitsky called, back from four days’ simultaneous translating at a political conference. She’s a very cynical translator and quite funny. It had been quite easy, she said, because it was just political speeches. “It would have been harder if people were saying what they really meant.”

There was a very strange news bulletin: “All was quiet in the city today except that a seventeen-year-old girl had a baby at the house of her parents and threw it out of the window.” End of bulletin.

Wednesday 27 November

The queue for visa photos was one-hour long, but just time for me to read *Izvestiya* through. Most of the developed photos were being put in the “foreign passports” tray, so a lot of people are travelling, or

leaving, or maybe that size of photo just suits other needs. Afterwards I called into the office. The glass has now been put into the kitchen door and the place looked fantastic. I felt a real swell of pride.

Last night the TV gave a long blow to the opening night of *The Russia House*, put on by the Soviet-British Creative Association. I kept seeing Amnesty's "ai" symbol on the souvenirs, invitations and pennants, and thought the UK Section of Amnesty had pulled off a brilliant advertising coup. Today I went to meet the association to see if there are more openings for us to advertise, but found that the symbol is *theirs*, faintly adapted from ours. A bugger!

The night news said someone had been beaten up and left for dead in Leningrad within sight of a meat queue. No one moved from the queue.

Thursday 28 November

I spent the morning at the Russian Parliament, speaking with Nikolay Vedernikov who has now shed his chair at the Clemency Commission and is in the Russian Constitutional Court – looking a lot better for it too. I put him in touch with criminologists abroad and he told me about the procedure in clemency cases.

I gave lunch to Othmar, my volunteer, then had a dispiriting afternoon trying to regularise my visa. Khlopyanov had not left the promised permission to extend it. At the photo shop I spent fully an hour rummaging through hundreds of photos, trying to find my prints. It was like a nightmare. The woman would come and dump new ones on the heap. Customers would take away random piles and sort through them. There was no way of knowing what you'd checked and what you hadn't. I began to feel desperate and decided to have a new set taken. As it was my turn to sit in front of the camera, my prints miraculously appeared at the top of a pile, and I vamoosed.

Although it was such a tiny thing I felt almost ill with nervous tension when I got home and had to sit and calm myself. In the evening I had my first chat in a long time with Nina Petrovna, recovering from her infarkt. She'd spent the coup in the hospital, listening to Radio Liberty and arguing with different patients. When she had her infarkt the doctor gave her an injection and said it would make her head swim round. "Is it swimming?" he asked. "No, the cupboard is," she replied. She's a good, self-effacing woman. In the last two weeks she's trained her cat to do the toilet actually *in* the toilet.

Friday 29 November

My visa expired today and neither Khlopyanov, Rumyantsev or Sokolenko were contactable at the USSR Foreign Ministry. I have no idea what this means, or how it will affect my trip to Kazakhstan next week.

My DHL delivery was full of more problems and my nerves immediately got ragged again. Maybe this is a combination of living here and not having proper holidays, but it worries me a bit. It is a reason for not carrying on too long.

There was a shout from the courtyard and Tanya the masseuse appeared in a long skirt, glitter on her face and black stovepipe hat. Not your average Soviet punter. She was locked out. She said she didn't like the look of me and asked what was wrong. She's got a very sure sense of people's vibes, because I'd only just opened the door with what I thought was a welcoming smile on my face.

I've spent the week chasing our registration papers round like a puck on ice, and now they are with the Mayor of Moscow.

Saturday 30 November

A gorgeous bright morning. I caught up with Amnesty letters and did my first ironing in eleven months, shameful to say – on the floor, because there's no other surface.

After lunch Irina and I met up at Perovo station to go to an exhibition of sculpture by Vadim Sidur. Oddly enough I knew the work already, because the Moscow group is using it on Amnesty postcards. It was mostly good, in the style of Henry Moore, but you could see why Henry Moore is better. We walked back to Irina's, had dinner, then played Mozart duets. It was fantastic being back at a piano.

Today the country felt like a runaway train. The State Bank is refusing to pay state employees, because it has no more money. Passengers struck at two Moscow airports and threatened to occupy the runway, because they face such long delays. Hello Kazakhstan. The tourist exchange rate has been abolished because the rouble is so worthless. How does that affect travellers' cheques?

Notices signed by "The Workers of Moscow" appeared today calling for a protest march on 22 December, and demanding that the TV and press be taken away from "the hands of capital". Here we go again.

Sunday 1 December

A grey stony day that never brightened up. Yelena opened the door with a fantastic smile on her face. As usual there was a great atmosphere of peace and cleanliness in their flat. We sat by candlelight and drank some wine, while Stanislav held Alexandra, all tightly swaddled up. Apparently the maternity ward was deserted because so few people are having babies these days.

It occurs to me that I know some fantastic people here. Very free of illusions about themselves or other people. Very deep too.

The Quaker meeting was full of new people, including a one-eyed tour guide from Uglich who had also stood on the barricades, and who

impressed me. Remarkably, all the Soviet men there were very interested in what the Soviet feminist was saying. All the young members of the meeting are a thoughtful lot and seem to feel responsible for what they must do in the future here.

Monday 2 December

Every day here is an unpredictable blank, from which you have to try to cobble together a coherent timetable. No one is at their desk. We all seem to be running about the streets trying to call each other. Mind you, not many people have desks.

The Mayor of Moscow has signed our registration papers and Oleg Malginov at the Foreign Ministry's Human Rights Division has pulled strings to try to get my visa extended. I also managed to make contact with the Russian parliamentary human rights committee, who want my help translating comparative legislation. The number of things I've bought, English lessons I've given and things I've translated, to help with our registration! (Not enough apparently.)

In the morning I met a young seamstress whose brother is doing seven years for economic crimes connected with his garage, and she took me for chips at McDonald's. She had real charm and seemed to be enjoying campaigning for him because of the interesting people she met.

In the afternoon my naval judge bearded the lion in his den, met me in full military uniform, and took me round the military law institute. I like him immensely. He's very proud of his institute and the Soviet armed forces, but resolutely against the death penalty and totally intelligent about Amnesty. No slouch either when it comes to law. He is prepared if need be to take part in the death penalty round table with *Sovetskaya Justitsiya*.

The TV equipment is booked for tomorrow at 10.30am to record the Human Rights Day programme. I prepared my bit until 1.00am and was very impressed by all Amnesty's materials on Morocco. It seems to have been a fantastic campaign.

Tuesday 3 December

Had a dreadful day. For some reason my interview was in the snow on the street outside the TV centre. As I had no hat and was holding pictures up in gloveless hands, it was bloody freezing. Vladimir Alimov was counting away the minutes with his fingers, off camera, and two minutes from the end my Russian collapsed and I just gabbled.

The Consular Division of the USSR Foreign Ministry was supposed to have my new extended visa ready from 9.00am, but knew nothing about me. I went to sit in the queue and nodded off, then was suddenly surrounded by policemen and a very strident woman, who was extremely patronising and wouldn't let me finish a sentence. I

suddenly sprang to my feet and bullied her back. She was startled. It's a terrible place. Fat men with bull necks and red faces burst out of an inner sanctum and rage at poor people stuck in the queue, who are only trying to renew their blasted visas. The worst parts of Soviet life writ large. No wonder it's fallen apart.

I made my second trek to collect some private photos, only to find they'd taken an early lunch break. I stood and battered on the glass door, shouting "Open up!", until they did and gave me my pictures. I'm afraid I'm going to leap at someone's throat and dismember them before my time here is up. I find my own behaviour quite alarming.

I went to bed in the afternoon then had a nice evening. The Desperate Donnegans from next door came, bringing me homemade cakes. I had a massage and then Siffra came over late to pick up a letter, and we sat drinking whisky until 2.00am. Gorbachev had sent an ultimatum by letter to all USSR Members of Parliament today, pushing them to accept the Union Treaty, and she'd had to write a late article about it. He really has pinned his colours to the mast about this treaty, even though in essence it is bound to evolve between the republics in time anyway.

Wednesday 4 December

Today the Consular Division had my visa ready in five minutes with a smile. I delivered a list of non-governmental organisations to Oleg Malginov at the USSR Foreign Ministry and more materials to *Sovetskaya Justitsiya*, before calling again on Yelena and Stanislav. Various ex-prisoners have been bringing Yelena food to help her with nursing the baby. We sat eating white bread and butter and it was really lovely. My eyes must have lit up when I saw the cheese they'd got from the Baltic, and she insisted on giving me some to take home with me.

I couldn't think what on earth to take to Kazakhstan as presents, so eventually bought a bottle of port and chocolate from a hard currency shop.

Trip to Kazakhstan: 5–11 December

The plane was delayed for five hours because of snow, and then we were diverted via Semipalatinsk for two hours at midnight. It was -18 degrees there and a strange chemical smell was wafting in across the ice on the runway. Got in to Alma-Ata at 7.00am their time. Poor Zaure had been to the airport three times that night to meet me.

It turned out their grandfather had died just ten minutes before I arrived, and so my trip coincided with Muslim family mourning. I felt awkward at first, but they obviously didn't, and so it was alright. Zaure's mother is a fantastic figure: tall, with high cheekbones and a turban, from the Kypshak tribe in the north. She sat on a stool in the kitchen, warming her back on the radiator. She's a professor of

biology who has specialised in wheat culture all her life and got various awards, but now says she spends her time worrying about what they will eat. She's developed a kind of asthma and lost 40lbs in the last year. A very beautiful woman. The flat was very hot and dry and I too got a tight chest and cough.

Alma-Ata is a long thin town, sloping downhill with a fantastic view behind to a mountain range, all in snow. On the other side of the mountains is China. During Brezhnev's time it got a lot of money and the main buildings all look quite new and prosperous, with very attractive oriental arches everywhere. Nevertheless, the city is on a grid system, and as a whole is not desperately attractive or interesting.

People in Alma-Ata are just coming up to the fifth anniversary of the 17 December massacre, and a commission will be reporting its findings at a public conference next week. All around the Parliament building where it happened there were white rags tied round branches and bushes to commemorate it. Zaure works in a laboratory which is 90% Russian, and where the ethnic relations are very good. She'd been to see what was happening when the massacre started and got her back teeth knocked out by the police. When she went back into the laboratory, the Russians had been given plastic sticks filled with metal by the District Party Committee, and told to join the fray. They went, laid down their sticks and came away again.

It's a very complicated scene and hard to understand. Most people I met had apparently been connected to the Party with more or less cynicism, and are bewildered and cynical about what has replaced it. Both Zaure and her mother thought her grandfather had died at the right time. People's attitudes to Nazarbayev are mixed. Some people said what a pathetic reflection on "democracy" it was, that there was no one to challenge him in the elections. Just like old times. Zaure had urged her friends to vote nevertheless, just to underline the idea of Kazakh statehood. Otherwise she was afraid they would be carved up and clapped together with who knows what republics. However, during my stay Nazarbayev was invested as president in a ceremony carried out on TV in Kazakh and Russian in a very relaxed way, and everyone admired his speech.

There's no real history of political imprisonment in Kazakhstan and I realised that in an odd way it means a lack in society now. There's no pole of behaviour by which to measure things – everyone apparently compromised – and I met no one as "free" as Moscow ex-prisoners seem to me. Instead the Afghan war veteran movement seems to be one of the strongest social forces, and I heard many discussions of the war at different mealtimes. People also seem to be united in a sort of suppressed outrage about the 1986 massacre. However, Zaure says the atmosphere reminds her of Riga in 1981:

everyone stays at home in the evenings and there are discussions in public.

The Minsk agreement, uniting Russia, Belorussia and Ukraine in a "commonwealth", was struck while I was there and it was actually a real eye-opener to be in a Muslim republic when the news broke. "Another coup," Zaure's mother said. "A Slav Union." Their first thought was for the Muslims in Russia. "Get walking," she said to me. "There'll be a hard January and civil war in spring." My first thought was for my Russian friends, shunted about again like so many pieces of furniture, with not even Parliament involved in this massive constitutional change. Both Shevardnadze and Gorbachev had met Yeltsin behind closed doors last week, and I wondered if they had agreed this step in advance, as a way of keeping Ukraine in the fold.

I found the cultural change in Kazakhstan very difficult. Underneath their immense hospitality, I felt my hosts do not like Westerners. My port and chocolate were laid aside and I thought perhaps I'd been too showy, so after a few days bought them some apples – which were also laid aside. They were forever appearing mysteriously in my bag or by my bedside. I actually began to feel offended that they wouldn't accept anything from me, because it didn't seem much basis for a friendship. I had been thinking of buying Zaure's mother a carved wooden box, but decided not to because it would look expensive again. On the last day it occurred to me that I probably offended a code by offering my hosts food, as though they weren't feeding me properly. Very different from Moscow. They were probably offended that I *hadn't* given them something like a box too.

I loved the cosmopolitanism there though. Some of Zaure's friends had Chinese guests staying with them. Some Uigur relatives came to the grandfather's funeral, including some professional "wailers". Zaure speaks Kazakh, Russian, Czech, English, Italian and now French. As Nazarbayev's investiture came to an end on TV, he held out both palms then wiped them down his cheeks – a Muslim custom. Watching the TV, Zaure and her mother did the same thing. Friends came round and sat with the family when they heard about the grandfather. They all talked about him and raised toasts to life and death, and the grandmother wept. It all seems a better way of mourning than in the West.

On the Saturday two of Zaure's friends took me walking up in the mountains. We ended up at a so-called ski resort with a dilapidated hotel, where everything was shut. The lobby was like some NUPE headquarters, with lists of "Orders and Instructions" on the wall, all reading like the statute of an insurance company. I think it's holidays that bring home the most depressing parts of life here. You can't go where you want to, but have to connive to get some pass to share a

room with a sixty-year-old and have your meals in a canteen with strangers. When you would like to get away from the system, you're brought bang up face to face with it. It snowed quite heavily on the way down and suddenly everything looked natural and beautiful, and we seemed removed from the city.

I was struck on the flight over that we were given no safety instructions but instead they read out all the punishments for smoking on board. Administer and command, not explain and persuade. My flight back made perfect time and we travelled in blue skies over hours of snowy wastes.

When I got into Moscow the bread shops were shut with signs saying "No bread" on them. I went scavenging round the shops and found my first pint of milk since I arrived on 18 November.

Saturday 14 December

I felt ghastly all the time I was in Kazakhstan and immediately felt fresher when I got back to Moscow, but today a cold has come out that maybe I was sickening with in Alma-Ata. I spent Thursday catching up with my Kazakh report and chasing six boxes which the London office has sent me, but which have got stuck in customs. Apparently the papers for registering our office with the Moscow Mayordom are now ready.

On Friday Irina and I went up to the Quakers to interpret at a meeting with Moloccans from Armenia. Like all Protestants here they impressed me because they work hard and they keep their word. Simple things, but a breath of fresh air here. They are returning to Russia from exile in the peripheries of the USSR because they say they want to be "a stream of clean water in the surrounding muddy turmoil". They sang some psalms, and interestingly enough, they too use the oral tradition of "hooks", like the fourteenth-century Greeks.

Nazarbayev has brought Kazakhstan and the other Islamic states into the Commonwealth of Independent States as co-founders, which is being greeted with relief by Moscow and Western papers. Nevertheless the feeling among ordinary people, and me, is apocalyptic. I've just had Andrey round for dinner and he foresees a military clampdown by late January, followed by civil war in Russia. While he was here two friends phoned, making their plans to get to the UK before "the next time". For the first time in my life I've come out in eczema on my hands over the last three weeks, which is maybe like my stomach complaint during the last coup.

Somehow the job is paling against the background of events. I keep pushing ahead on registration etc., without any confidence that the office is feasible. I am also scared of being trapped here by accident. A friend said tonight that trains out of the country are cancelled and flights are packed. Meanwhile I keep trying to take each

step as it comes. Today I was wondering how I would move my furniture to the new flat. As keeps happening, tonight Andrey offered spontaneously to get me his friend's ambulance.

Sunday 15 December

Yesterday's contribution seems to have been written in a state of delirium.

Today I decided to fast and was interested to see my cold steadily get better. I sat writing Christmas cards in the afternoon and realised I was sitting there, plain scared. In the evening I went to the Quakers and there were eighteen people there, most of them very enthusiastic about the Minsk agreement and uncomprehending when I told them the Kazakh reaction. Valentina said she couldn't forget the way women were raped in Baku during the pogroms. I said they were raped during the Brixton riots too, and Azerbaijanis are not Kazakhs. Sasha was honest enough to say that when he looks inside himself, he sees that he doesn't like Muslims; he fears them.

Monday 16 December

I tried to be very methodical today and plodded through the snow, finishing what I had to do. I met a guy from Tambov, prosecuted on a sodomy charge, then picked up our registration papers from the Mayor of Moscow's office. They were some of the last that Gavriil Popov signed before resigning as Mayor, and symbolically ours were done on Human Rights Day.

I took advantage of talking to the lawyer in the Protocol Department of the Mayordom, who horrified me by saying that since the coup all property has passed into the hands of the Mayor's office, so Krasnopresnensky District Soviet no longer have the authority to grant us office space. We need a new authorisation from the Mayor's office. I felt almost tearful, as it took five months to get the first one – never mind all the building work we've had done to the office. On sober reflection though I decided to consult with the Moscow Justice Department about it all, and have an appointment with them tomorrow.

I changed money to pay the builders' last instalment. £1 = 160 roubles today. Apparently it was 110 roubles last week. Tolya and I had a misunderstanding and each cooked dinner for the other tonight. He came here and I gave him a birthday present and paid him for all the good work he has done.

Erich Honecker is hiding out in the street next to Irina and her mother.

Tuesday 17 December

Another methodical day. I went to check out the Moscow Property and Privatisation Fund, which has moved from Kuznetsky Most, hopefully with all our documents still festering inside it. There I

had rather a miraculous morning. They were technically shut, but I was passed from one kind person to another, who tried to decide if my new registration paper from the Moscow Mayordom would be enough to clinch our property order for us. There's a fifty-fifty chance it will be.

Just to be sure, I also took advice with Nikita at the Moscow City Department of Justice. He advised against trying to get another property permit from the Mayordom, which would be hard, and said instead we should try to go locally through the Prefect of the Central District. He photocopied papers for me, free of charge.

All this actually took seven hours, but it bucked me up. When I got in a man called who thinks the KGB is controlling his thoughts by parapsychology. He sounded in quiet despair. I talked to him for quite some time.

Wednesday 18 December

I'd had a telegram from the sister of a man on death row: on 6 November Gorbachev had refused to give him clemency, but the family found out only on 25 November. Meanwhile the press is full of new evidence that suggests he's innocent, and the family doesn't know if he's alive or dead. This morning I did a lot of ringing round at the USSR Supreme Soviet to find out. No one knows, but there's no record that he has been executed, so I sent a telegram to this effect to his sister. The telegram woman blinked when she read it, as I was standing there with my bag of laundry, waiting to pay.

In town I queued for a cake, and without any warning two men in the queue suddenly hit each other. It was horrible and immediately put everyone's nerves on edge. The cake woman bawled me out for having the wrong change. I felt beaten.

Galina Starovoytova and the ex-prisoner Valeriya Novodvorskaya were debating on a current affairs programme, *In the Corridors of Power*, tonight. Both are masters of the soundbite and sharp remark, and the dynamic between them was very interesting. Basically Starovoytova's line was: "You try doing it and you'd shut up after five minutes."

Someone called to say Ekho Moskvy radio station had reported on our registration tonight. Unexpected!

Thursday 19 December

I'm terribly down in the dumps this week and can't shake it off. Basically I don't feel well. I spent the morning trying to contact the Turkmenian Embassy without any luck, then tried the Estonians on the off-chance. They asked me to come within the hour, so I had to change and read up all our stuff on Estonia in ten minutes flat. Had quite an interesting hour with the Chargé d'Affaires, but although he was quite nice and forthcoming, Estonia seems to be rather an inward-

looking little country.

Irina and I saw Placido Domingo in the film of *Othello*, marred by the sound, which came and went. She'd brought my boots from the menders near her house, and had even polished them.

Got home very cold and exhausted. Felt immensely lonely and depressed in the evening. Tolya said Radio Rossiya had announced our registration. Nikolay said it was on the front page of *Izvestiya* and very nicely complimented me.

Friday 20 December

Tanya came round to give me a massage at 7.00am. She'd gone to bed at 3.30am, was up at 5.00am and full of beans with me. Her woollen leggings were itching her to death, so I helped her wrap newspapers round her legs underneath them. She was off to her old orphanage to give them 2,000 roubles and be Father Christmas. She said anyone listening to my voice would think I was the most unhappy person on earth. Then she overheard some of my phone calls about executions, and I think she saw why.

I went up to Moscow Psychiatric Hospital No. 4, where I had been asked to introduce the AGM of the Independent Psychiatric Association by Dr Savenko. It was rather an interesting day: about fifty mainstream psychiatrists, who work voluntarily, giving independent diagnoses and helping rehabilitate former victims of psychiatric abuse. What was most interesting is that they are also publishing independently, so that the stranglehold on the profession is loosening in one respect at least. They all knew each other well and the atmosphere was nice.

Irina's mother was there and sat next to me. She said after she'd written an article criticising the Ministry of Health, two psychiatrists had been sent round to see her at her office – and that was Moscow, 1990. This week she'd also been No. 138 in a queue for Dutch cheese, but refused to give the shop assistant her hand to write the number down – so her number went to the person behind. She invited me round for Christmas.

Father Nikon came round for five hours in the evening. It was a struggle lasting out. He wants to market an ancient preparation for removing unwanted hair, and is sure it will make him a million in the West. He too is in the throes of registration and described various encounters where he came out in a sweat and was filled with dread. Only someone who's been through it can understand it.

These past few weeks I've been trying to organise an invitation for a friend from home to come and stay over Christmas. My own invitation was not enough to get her a visa and so in the space of a week I managed to get an official invitation for her from Natalya's Legal Fund, courier it to London, and she got her visa today.

Apparently Gromovik at the USSR Embassy in London said, “Marjorie should have known better”, i.e. it should have been obvious that people who’ve never heard of Sarah should pretend to invite her for reasons that don’t exist. Silly me.

Saturday 21 December

I slept on the floor last night and it was much better than the lumpy couch. Woke feeling better than I have in ages.

En route to the second day of the psychiatry seminar, I dropped off death penalty materials at Viktor’s place. Viktor has made contact with Gorbachev’s assistant and is suggesting he commute all death sentences as a final presidential gesture. Viktor predicts a coup in January.

After that it was quite peaceful to spend the day discussing schizophrenia and anti-psychiatry – a very interesting seminar by any standards. Some psychotherapists spoke – all of them young and in jeans, and alluding to art rather than science. It was quite refreshing. I spoke with one over lunch, who is trying to do “social psychotherapy” in St Petersburg, i.e. trying to give people a sense of hope and calm. She said one newsreader ended his broadcast with: “See you tomorrow, if you’re alive!”, and this is the kind of thing she hopes to change. She also said people are now beginning to laugh in queues there, but it’s not a healthy sign. She thinks it shows they’re near the edge. Another speaker referred in his talk to a “Russian theory of psycho-analysis” and he and the audience stopped to laugh.

Dr Savenko is rather impressive. He sat on the platform, wiry and slightly theatrical, the stringy flowers in the vase next to him mirroring his long wispy hair. I sat with Natalya Ivanovna again and we had some nice talks. She said I have managed to get myself quite deeply into the scene. I hope so.

On the way home I had potato pie at Viktor’s place. They watch the news at 9.00, 11.00 and 12.00pm and 1.00am. So do I, and so does Natalya Ivanovna. Viktor arrived back with Dima, another politico from Syktyvkar, and they compared notes about the day’s events. From the point of view of the country’s political culture, Viktor thinks Yeltsin is behaving abominably to Gorbachev. Both are watching Zhirinovsky in the wings. Today the Minister of Internal Affairs confirmed there were tank movements round Moscow. Eleven republics have joined the “Commonwealth” today.

Sunday 22 December

Another good night’s sleep on the floor. Anna Bochko and I spent three hours with Professor Avetisyan, drafting a statute for Amnesty’s Information Office, which should help us register with the Russian government. Professor Avetisyan was just out of bed, unshaved and hair unbrushed. It was pretty boring but very useful and I think it’s a

good statute.

Irina came for dinner. Apparently there are soldiers with machine guns on the outer ring road where they live. She seems to be caught in the wrong play somehow. One ghastly thing after another unfolds and the years pass.

I saw my first 200-rouble note today in the market. Apparently 1,000-rouble notes are being prepared.

Russian TV ended tonight with a valedictory interview with Gorbachev. Artyom Borovik said the whole film crew felt Gorbachev has been dealt with too harshly.

Monday 30 December

A US friend phoned, here for about two months and now beginning to feel the strain – one thing being the constant phone calls and demands. She was also complaining that she can't get milk at the hard currency shop. Interesting: there'll probably be a rash of pieces in the Western press now about the parlous state of the economy.

Sarah has been and gone back to the UK. We had Christmas dinner of salad and cabbage pie with Irina and her mother. Natalya Ivanovna said Irina had unpicked all her childhood clothes and reknitted them as jumpers for them both. As I translated this for Sarah, I thought Irina looked pained. For two immensely talkative people they seemed very embarrassed by our company and a silence descended as we listened to Billie Holiday. On the way back into my flat Sarah stood on a live mouse. When I looked out of the door five minutes later, it was half a corpse with the house cat lying next to it, and another dead mouse behind it. It keeps bringing me love offerings.

Somehow we missed Gorbachev's resignation: Irina's phone and TV had gone *phut!* at the same time on Christmas Day. Meanwhile the war in Georgia was raging all week. I carried on trying to do some skeletal work during Sarah's visit, trying to catch all the bureaucrats before they go off on holiday in early January.

I discovered that property ground plan forms have now been changed, and so I had to revisit the Bureau of Technical Administration and get them to fill out the new form for our premises. These offices go on forever, but all the staff seem to change in the space of five months. This time I had to see a man who was about my age, looking dismal, reading *Pravda* under a picture of Lenin, and with eczema all over his hands too. I also took inscribed books to the Moscow City Justice Department to thank Nikita and Yury Kostanov for helping us to register with the Mayordom. Nikita flushed with embarrassment and all the secretaries looked proud and pleased for him.

Today a Tajik who had been at our death penalty seminar came

round and offered to sell our death penalty reports at Moscow University. He is going to a placement in the Tajik Foreign Ministry next year, and was a very personable, intelligent type. He says he faces racist abuse almost every day in Moscow, but that Slavs in Tajikistan are mild and lovely people.

During the week I made the discovery that all my hard currency has been stolen from inside the flat – about £350. I have my suspicions but don't know how to handle it. Pretty sickening.

Since Tatyana did a talk on local radio, a number of new people have been coming along to the Quakers, a few of them one plate short of a picnic set.

Tuesday 31 December: New Year's Eve

After answering Amnesty letters all day, I went to Yelena's in the evening. I had expected there would be a feast and many guests as usual, but it was just me. They'd obviously thought that I might be seeing in the New Year on my own. It was a very peaceful family evening, finishing with a meal at midnight. As we got the food ready we listened to a Russian Orthodox priest on the radio, who started criticising foreign religions imported from abroad. Yelena switched it off to her mother's annoyance, but I think it was to avoid offending me. She later said she didn't like him saying unpleasant things about Western influences.

They're all devout Russian Orthodox and on their pre-Christmas fast. I asked what they thought about their new "Commonwealth". Yelena and Stanislav laughed, and Yelena's mother looked at me blankly then carried on with what she was doing. Yelena said, "It's nonsense – but it was a terrific break-up." We listened to the Kremlin bells bringing in the New Year, but there was no speech to the nation on the radio. Yelena's mother reminisced about seeing Stalin, Kalinin and Beria on the Mausoleum on May Day in 1941, shortly before they went to war. She'd written all about it to her aunt who was then in exile. Same aunt now plays with the Israeli Philharmonic.

We ate exclusively food from Yelena's hut in exile: mushrooms, potatoes and berries. In an odd way Yelena's exile has kept the family going; it is where she met Stanislav too. They all said how strange it was that I have been there and know what they are talking about. Yelena's mother had gone there in -45 degrees frost.

When I'm with them I feel like a child with three extremely nice adults. There's something about the way they care for me in an unfussy way, and their relations with each other, that seems very mature. Stanislav is a very unusual man. He will spend a lot of time talking and telling you about his feelings. He also doesn't present himself as the hero of his stories.

1992

Wednesday 1 January: New Year's Day

Thick snow and a bright blue sky. I met Irina at 10.00am to go and visit Sakharov's grave in Vostryakovo cemetery. It got colder and colder, and we froze on a bus with iced windows that trundled round and round the outskirts of Moscow. The cemetery is outside town near a forest, and although the bus stop was deserted, round the corner there were a lot of people in the cemetery. It looked beautiful in the snow: big wide alleys of trees stretching between the jumbles of graves, and black-coated figures in the distance, going to pay their respects. It was funny, we'd be walking along a deserted alley, when suddenly there'd be an old man with a walking stick tottering on ahead of us and we had no idea where he'd come from.

Sakharov's grave was signposted. Candles were burning in front of it and there were fresh flowers, to which we added our two yellow carnations. What moved me most was seeing the grave of Yelena Bonner's mother there too, and the empty plot between it and Sakharov's, which is presumably reserved for Yelena Bonner. It is sobering when you remember someone very much alive then see the spot where they now lie.

It must have been -10 degrees with a strong wind when we waited for the bus back. Irina got something in her eye and wanted me to help take it out, so we stood gloveless in the freezing cold and I could hardly move my fingers, let alone do advanced surgery. It was only 1.00pm when we got back, so we decided to go skiing. The sun was setting behind the birch trees as we went round Kuskovo Park. A fantastic deep yellow sky, great silence, and little dark figures in the distance.

Back to Irina's for dinner and to listen to the new jazz tapes I'd got from home. We were sitting by candlelight as their bulbs have gone. There's also no bread in their area so we ate something Natalya Ivanovna had baked without milk, eggs or butter. Before the public holidays I stood in a really vicious queue for bread. The tension and aggression between people were palpable and there was a running political commentary going in different parts of the shop – the sort you might hear in a London taxi. People were shouting insults over at other parts of the queue, like: "Why don't you go and live in Georgia then?" Today, however, there was a relaxed atmosphere and people were very pleasant in the metro and in the cemetery.

Thursday 2 January

I spent the day with Professor Avetisyan's statute for our office, first translating it into English and sending it to London, then typing it

up onto the computer in Russian. In breaks from the computer I tried to pin down the Property Privatisation Fund and finally succeeded. They said our property papers have now been forwarded to the Prefect of the Central District. We're slowly getting there.

The shops were all shut so I couldn't take a look at the prices that were liberalised yesterday. At 10.00am a rather deranged woman came to the door and walked straight into the flat, before I barred her way. A rather deranged man had done the same thing to Natalya Vysotskaya last week. Someone is obviously giving out our addresses.

All the homilies from Russian newsreaders are getting a bit hard to take. Each item ends with, "God grant it won't happen here", and each broadcast with, "Be kinder to each other" etc. There was a nice report about a British gift of beef, which had failed the Russian Ministry of Health's hygiene test. With silent irony the camera focused on down-and-outs in a filthy street while the woman reporter said, "though *why* it was not good enough for us is a mystery, when it feeds half the European Community".

Bakatin has left the KGB with some dire remarks about its unreformability and *Izvestiya* has gone back to an old typeface. Neither encouraging omens. Talking of which, after the news there is a five-minute astrological prediction for business people next day. Tonight they were warned not to take decisions or do deals after 2.00pm. The economy somehow feels as though it is guided by astrology.

Friday 3 January

Yesterday's snowstorms continued. The laundry ladies warned me it would be expensive, and it has gone up from 2 to 20 roubles. The place was deserted and I'm sure their work will be cut down.

Another day of hunting by phone. Apparently our property documents have already been cleared by the Central Prefektura. We seem to be moving on an inside track here. I got quite punch drunk, clipping four *Izvestiya* in one day.

I'm starting to clear and tidy the flat, ready for moving on 25 January. In the evening I was ironing clothes on the floor by the light of one lamp bulb, listening to Rachmaninov, and suddenly felt immensely happy. I've had a great year, one way or another.

There was a tribute to an actor on TV tonight and people were reminiscing about their youthful exploits with him. One actress was remembering how they'd stolen a light bulb in the street: "It was the 1920s at the end of the New Economic Policy, and light bulbs were hard to come by." "You mean like now?" the interviewer said. "Now it's absolutely impossible," the actress said, "then it was just hard." A lot of people's reminiscences are quite funny, because either things haven't changed or they're worse. The piquancy moves forward.

Tonight the *news* ended with an astrological prediction, about disaster when the sun/moon moves into Capricorn on Sunday, but telling us not to believe it. We seem to be living in a stream of the subconscious here. I wonder what it would take for the BBC to switch to the same style.

Saturday 4 January

I spent fully five hours trudging round the square mile of local shops. First the shoe repair shop wouldn't take one boot on its own, then the bag repair shop was just shutting with a lot of bad temper, then by the time I got to the bottle bank it had shut. Eventually I got my boots and bag repaired and also a new zip put in other boots. The boot repair that was 12 roubles in autumn is now 119.

I also went in to town and bought a St Petersburg train ticket for a colleague who's coming out from the London office. The waiting room at the station is now paying only, and people were sitting in tidy rows, watching a bank of TVs. The cost of a single ticket has risen from 12 to 30 roubles – and there was no queue! I'd been dreading it.

I then went in search of a birthday cake for Nikolay's mother tomorrow and ended at Yeliseyevsky's posh gastronom on Tverskaya Street. There's a picture of Yeliseyevsky in pre-revolutionary subfusk high up among the mosaics and chandeliers. I watched some deaf and dumb women in woollen hats gesturing up at it, apparently not very impressed. The queue for the cash desk took over an hour. The cashiers were having trouble remembering the new prices and had to keep shouting, "How much are oats?" "Thirty roubles," came the reply, and a sort of shriek came from the queue. I felt there was a masochistic pleasure in people's reaction, as though they were ready to give their opinion to any passing correspondent at a moment's notice.

I find all the economic reports really interesting now. Before I used to wonder why they listed such a random bunch of things, like macaroni, oil and beetroot. But there aren't supermarkets or shopping arcades, and shopping is just a discovery of random items, never the same two days running, so one random list is as good as another.

On my way to Leningrad Station I passed a man in black shirt, trousers, boots and black leather Sam Brown, selling fascist leaflets, under a sign saying, "The Black Hundreds – Russia's last bastion". About five men had stopped and were chatting to him. Other people looked and hurried by.

Misha sent me a good letter from Yugoslavia this morning. His classes are being interrupted by bomb scares and a student of his has been called up. Vukovar is only one hour from Belgrade. He'd asked his students to write an essay on "What concerns the youth of Yugoslavia today?" and regretted it, because the despair and trapped

feeling which came through what they wrote was terribly upsetting to read.

Saw milk on the black market today – 7 roubles a carton.

Sunday 5 January

At 2.00pm Peter Jarman and I visited the church of All Saints at Kitay Gorod, where we may hold the Quaker meetings in future. Although it's Russian Orthodox they're ecumenically minded. It's a brick church built in the 1600s on the remains of a fourteenth-century wooden church there. Inside it's stripped back to the brick, with a cardboard iconostasis and the odd nineteenth-century fresco glimmering through patches of plaster. I liked it immensely. We had to wait until Father Martyry had finished baptising a family, and I was interested to watch how it was done. After wetting their heads he dabbed water on their eyes, ears, mouth and feet, which Peter probably rightly interpreted as "God be in your seeing, listening, the things you say and where your feet lead you." Afterwards they had to process round the font three times, with their boots undone and flapping round their ankles. Although they looked really uplifted by the baptism, I thought they looked self-conscious about the boots.

I took the birthday cake to Nikolay's mum and we had tea with her childhood friend Alla, also a Communist and supporter of the coup. I decided to agree with everything I could. It was odd: they believe social morality has gone and look back to a time when there were principles and hope. I expect the people in the church earlier think at last there is a possibility for principles and hope. There's actually no real reason why one group should exclude the other either, is there? There was a bizarre moment when Maya Nikolaevna and Alla started naming scientists who survived the purges and concluding triumphantly, "Well, they didn't destroy him!" each time, as though somehow this was a big favour. That is the point at which you can't agree.

A US Quaker has been getting Quaker literature translated here and trying to get it published. Tonight at the meeting she burst into tears and said the bureaucracy had broken her and she was going back to the US with nothing finished. I could sympathise with her, but I think her despair is actually a measure of her own willpower. The meeting was great and so was our talk afterwards. We're getting to know each other better. There was a very nice electrician there from Dubna. The meeting seemed to have knocked him out.

Monday 6 January

A rather springlike blue sky like yesterday, a thaw, and a breeze rustling the branches. I'd heard the Dutch Embassy was offloading old furniture and thought it might suit our office. They were very nice, but the furniture has already gone.

I popped to the Desperate Donnegans to wish them Happy New Year and they gave me Christmas dinner as tomorrow is Orthodox Christmas. Alexei and Anya were just back from the UK, where they seem to have mixed with an extraordinary bunch of people who went to Westminster, wear cravats and are members of the Royal Automobile Club. I felt embarrassed to be British as we listened to their tales. Grandma came through – a very beautiful blonde forty-eight-year-old in black velvet dress, with a kind of smoke-ridden voice. They're all very nice and natural with me.

Gamsakhurdia has fled his bunker and a racing driver in Spain is ready to become constitutional monarch of Georgia.

Another opera. Meanwhile the queues outside the milk shop here are like constant pickets.

Tuesday 7 January: Orthodox Christmas

A huge banner is hanging from the Lenin Museum, praying for "Christlike insight". There was an amazing scene in the underpass at the foot of Tverskaya Street. A young man with wild hair and a loud checked suit was playing an accordion, stamping about and singing in a loud gravelly voice about the sufferings of Russia and "Lord, come down to earth". The whole underpass filled, listening to him in silence, then streams of people came forward in their Sunday-best clothes to give him money. "What's your name?" someone shouted. "Revolution," he replied. It was extraordinary.

I had lunch with Peter Jarman and two people from "Memorial", back from South Ossetia, and they discussed the possibility of sending conflict-resolution workers there from Northern Ireland. Apparently quite good. The "Memorial" woman invited me to do a weekly five-minute slot on their radio programme. Great!

In the afternoon I took a walk to see what's coming on at the Conservatoire. I live in a very beautiful city, and calmly strolling through the snow past all these lovely buildings in the peace and quiet, I realised how lucky I am that this is "home".

War and Peace was on TV tonight. Brilliant.

Wednesday 8 January

I felt awful by the end of the day. I think it's because I was hungry, but there's almost nothing I can bear to eat – something seems to have happened to my stomach. There are no potatoes and there was no bread again today. I saw some milk in a shop but it turned out to be reserved for children. I seem to be living on soup. The cold also makes me very tired.

It would be nice if something happened without complications. Six boxes from the London office are still waiting for me in customs, where they have been since October. The man who eventually agreed to clear and deliver them for me is off ill. The actor Peter Gale has

authorised all his roubles to be transferred to Amnesty, but when I went to the bank today they wanted a notarised translation of his request from the USSR Consulate in London! When I offered to translate it myself they said I might make up anything. Since he's giving me all his money, what is there to make up? Also all my computer payments to the Wells Fargo Bank in California have gone missing.

Today was my introduction to the Central Prefektura, who have to make a rent agreement with me about our premises. Valentina Olekhnovich is one of those people with a brisk, businesslike manner who's totally chaotic. It turned out they'd lost all our papers during an office party at Christmas. We eventually found them and after a lot of shuffling and tapping of them, she said, "Well, I think that's where we'll stop today." When I made mild noises of protest, she sent me to get a chitty from the District Office of Exploitation – good name – to prove the premises have not been promised to anyone else in the meantime.

I went across town to Tatyana Andreyevna Krasynova, a surprisingly young woman, sitting in the bleak little PREO office. She rang Olekhnovich about me and I listened to their New Year conversation. "We must be kinder, and support each other, or at a time like this we might all go under." Dismal. They're all a bit too good at supporting each other. Krasynova asked if it was I who had put the new door on the office, and with quailing heart I said yes. "Well done," she said, unexpectedly. I took the chitty back to Olekhnovich and now our case has to go before a commission on 22 January. I asked if it could be decided any earlier and she turned blank and stony eyes on me.

The Prefektura is trying to charge us the normal rent for public organisations: 1,600 roubles per square metre. I said this did not seem fair as we'd been refused permission to register as a public organisation. The alternative is a 70-rouble rate as a charity. Great if we can get it.

Thursday 9 January

I meant to have a domestic day but got caught up in writing and really enjoyed it. Wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper in Estonia about the death penalty, another one to a paper in Kyrgyzstan and one to the head of a college of advocates in Kazakhstan. Is it my imagination, or did we have no contacts like this at the beginning of the year? I also did a running phone interview all day about imprisoned homosexuals for a reporter from *The Advocate* in the USA. He was very pugnacious and polemical about it all, and I think was struck that I wasn't. I get a bit fed up with all the breast-beating on this issue.

Valery Rudnev rang from *Sovetskaya Justitsiya*, wanting me to do a round-table discussion on the death penalty next week with a professor of law who favours retention. He also wants to interview me for *Izvestiya*, which I suppose has been my ambition for Amnesty this year.

It was another day with precious little to eat. In the evening I went to Hella's and made up for it. Other journalists were there and we talked about "the scene" until 2.00am. Although it's been ghastly I'm quite glad I've had the experience of finding property and working through the system, because it is an education. I also have the advantage of knowing "ordinary Russians", which foreign correspondents miss out on.

Friday 10 January

A great thaw and rather a steamy, rainy morning. By afternoon it was snowing and at night it was bloody freezing – so you were always in the wrong clothes at any particular time of the day.

I stayed over at Hella's then came back and took our mail down to the International Post Office. Three hundred and sixty roubles obviously seems cheap by current prices, and there was a huge queue of Caucasians sending blankets and boxes to unspecified destinations for literally thousands of roubles. The money was all in fives and tens, and so the poor woman was counting it all by hand, losing her place and starting again. I was in the queue for over two hours. On the way home I shopped at the market and bought bread, some goat's milk for 40 roubles, a chicken the size of a sparrow, and some honey.

Irina and I were supposed to be going to a Sibelius concert in the evening but, as keeps happening to us, it was cancelled. She came back here and we ate potatoes, cranberries, and relished goat's milk in our coffee. She says she too is hungry, but can't eat properly and some things she can no longer eat at all. It's probably something you have to come out of gradually.

Sasha Lukin from the Quakers rang. The Peruvian Ambassador had just sent him a telegram inviting him to the embassy to discuss the Amnesty case he had written about. He was alarmed. We'll go together.

Saturday 11 January

Took a complete break today. Had bread and butter with the Desperate Donnegans and they urged me to go to the police about my theft. Their grandma insisted on giving me three types of bread to take home with me.

I read Ilf and Petrov all afternoon for pleasure, then went round to the Teplitskys for dinner. Natasha's so caught up in her translations that it's like talking to someone who's doing crosswords. One minute she'll ask you if "framesaw" is the right word, then in the next

sentence she's off onto Database Information Management Systems. Her translator friend Olga was there, pulling out a scarf and reknitting it into socks, because there's no wool. I said how the food situation is affecting my stomach and they said they'd just been saying the same thing. Natasha had made a cake out of macaroni.

While I was there someone rang from Yaroslavl to say butter that was 170 roubles yesterday is 230 today. There is no butter in Odessa, but there are potatoes at 35 roubles. They were 8 roubles here yesterday.

I've remembered two things from the evening at Hella's. Yeltsin was on TV doing a tour in Ulyanovsk, and it was exactly like the early days of Gorbachev. I don't see the honeymoon lasting so long, however. The other thing was a story about Ira Yakir, who is now working as an assistant in the Russian Parliament. She heard the name of one of Vice-President Rutskoy's assistants, and turned cold. He was the one who interrogated her after her father, the dissenter Pyotr Yakir, was arrested in the 1960s, and almost provoked a miscarriage. She asked if she could see him, and it *was* he. She asked if he remembered her and he was thrown into confusion and said, "Who could forget Ira Yakir?" "So you do remember me?" she said, and he said, "No, I don't know who you are and we've never met." Death and the Maiden.

Sunday 12 January: Old "New Year"

The Quakers were very good again. Peter and Roswitha were falling over their Russian with fatigue and I felt for them. Russians are by and large very sympathetic and uncritical about your mistakes. They all listened patiently and then Valentina Konstantinova said quite sincerely what astonishing progress they've made in two months. On the bus home I asked if her feminist group has contact with the Libertarian Party, a radical lesbian group here. She said no, firmly. "So you have no common ground with them?" I asked. She said, "I think it's impossible to be a vegetarian in this country." She'd misheard me.

It was Old "New Year" and Irina and I went to a great midnight Prokofiev concert at the Pushkin Theatre, put on by young musicians. Another glimpse of culture reviving. Afterwards we took a walk through the backstreets in the dark and the snow and it all looked very beautiful, then Irina stayed over at my flat. She'd all but brought her own bedding, she was so anxious to be no trouble. She also gave me a tablecloth, some cheese and some ointment for my blotchy hands. I gave her some Lithuanian tampons I had come across. Present-giving is very nice here, like mutual grooming.

Monday 13 January

Desperately cold. I saw the Latvian Ambassador in the morning. I

liked his attitude to me and he talked freely enough to give me a picture of the full scope of their preoccupations. On the way home I picked up copies of my article from the *Journal of Humanitarian Sciences*, and they put me on the list to receive a food parcel. I also delivered a request to the Foreign Ministry Consular Division for a multiple re-entry visa for people in the London office. The Consular Division has become the "Russian" Consular Division since the last time I was there, but it still has the same bad-tempered staff and now a seething crowd trying to get in. An official took my envelope and said, "We don't like this, you know" and I said, "I don't like it either", in a quiet, but probably quite expressive, voice and for some reason this shut him up and he agreed to do it.

Viktor came round in the evening, the first time I've seen him alone for about eleven months. I gave him dinner of potatoes and tinned sprats, and he said it was the biggest blowout he'd had for ages. We have an unusual and valuable sort of relationship. Whatever the prevailing storms I always feel immense goodwill and respect from him, stemming from I'm not sure what. I asked his advice about my theft and he treated it in just the sort of imaginative way I was wanting someone to. How to catch out the thief. He now earns the equivalent of $2.50 a month as a research chemist, but hopes for a rise in February to bring it back up to $6.00. And he laughed.

Tuesday 21 January

Scenes from Russian life: I got paid for my article in the *Journal of Humanitarian Sciences* with two packets of macaroni, a tin of meat and some tea. The Desperate Donnegans said their father was paid two pints of milk for an art lecture. Must have been quite a good lecture to get two. Today I saw a very smartly dressed woman on the metro in a fur coat, fur hat and a string of toilet rolls round her neck.

Last Tuesday and Wednesday the temperature dropped to -24 degrees. The atmosphere feels empty when it gets so cold, as though all the warmth has been sucked out of the earth and you're walking round in some giant, sterile refrigerator.

I'm in the middle of an intensely busy, but interesting, two weeks. I've got to move the office stuff to Herzen Street, move house, and then there are a lot of meetings.

On Tuesday I went to see the Representative of Tajikistan and then talked my way into the first session of the Russian Constitutional Court. They were discussing Yeltsin's decree combining the KGB and police, and decided it was unconstitutional. It was terribly impressive, mainly because the court was *demanding* respect and got it. If their ruling holds, it may be the first step towards a law-based state. I was struck by how young the main figures in Russian politics are today – hardly a grey hair to be seen. It made me think about the international

Conference for Young Political Leaders that is apparently taking place round about now. All the real young leaders would be too busy to go.

Wednesday I spent writing my radio talk about the Morocco campaign. I was quite relaxed about recording it, but the producer leapt down my throat at each misplaced stress and my nerve began to go. In the evening I went to a gay party given by people from San Francisco, working here on an AIDS project. Some people with HIV who are facing imprisonment wanted to speak with me. A very Soviet solution, to imprison people who are HIV positive.

I just had to take Friday off. Irina had offered to help carry bags of papers from my flat over to the office, so we staggered through snowdrifts and slipped on black ice with three massive bags and a rucksack. As we wove our way round the queues for food on Herzen Street, being given the once-over by everyone in them, Irina said, "We've got *our* food – our bananas, avocados and salmon." It was funny. I'm sure they all thought we had.

Father Nikon came round in his black "Ciao Roma!" T-shirt on his way to celebrate an all-night eucharist for the Feast of Christ's Baptism. *His* registration papers had got lost too. I translated a good appeal he'd written to the Pope about Croatia, and we discussed Paul McCartney's wife's face.

After he left, the Desperate Donnegans invited me for homemade biscuits and a bottle of Greek wine at 11.00pm. We all eat so little that we got smashed and quite hilarious until 2.00am. They thought Greek wine would be sweet because of something they'd read about Socrates. I said they took a very academic approach and they said, "What alternative have we?" We talked about the Cold War and our countries' attitudes towards each other. Anna was taught that if there was an atomic explosion, she was to lie down on the floor and not to look at it (!). It really was very nice being able to talk about this with my real Soviet neighbours, and laugh over a bottle. It was amazing really.

There's been a great debate here about the last change of the hour, which made it dark at 3.00pm. People suspect the government robbed them of more than one hour. "If that's all they'd robbed us of," sighed Irina. Anyway, the upshot is that we changed back again at the weekend. Ukraine wasn't informed and there was a terrible pile-up of trains and planes, working to different clocks.

It was the same story of inflation when I went to the local post office on Monday to make arrangements to have my newspapers forwarded and renew Amnesty's PO box. What cost 40 roubles for twelve months last year now costs over 2,000. The post office woman sidled up to me and asked if I was leaving. Apparently her cousin lives in Tübingen and is involved with Amnesty there. "It's a very good

organisation," she said.

On the Tuesday evening I went round to Nina Petrovna, who now wants to arrange medical help for ex-prisoners. I wonder how well, and how well off, she herself is. She's only just over an infarkt, has cataracts, and for dinner was eating a plate of bread she'd soaked in milk and fried. I brought her some of my cheese, but she would hardly accept it.

I really enjoy spending time with her because she's funny and interesting, and so modest that fascinating things slip out obliquely. It turns out she was sacked from her laboratory for writing a letter in defence of Zhores Medvedev, the biologist who was put in psychiatric hospital in the 1970s. She also gets her medicine cheap now because she got a medal in the war. She was one of the people who dug the defences outside Ulyanovsk in the middle of winter, when the Soviets feared the Germans would turn north after Stalingrad. She says she's always enjoyed digging since then. After she mentioned a few of her brushes with authority I asked if she hadn't been scared. She said she was almost permanently scared, but when it came to a confrontation she was always enraged. I can understand that, I think.

I had spent seven hours on Sunday working on a radio talk about the death penalty, and really trying to tailor it to a local audience and make the Russian alive. On Wednesday I went up to the radio station at Ostankino to give it. There was no pass waiting for me and no one would help me by phone or at the desk. As I was stuck in the middle of nowhere and had spent so long preparing my piece, I was suddenly infuriated and made a huge scene at the pass desk, until the woman wiped the dumb insolence off her face, made some phone calls and got me in. I heard her say warily to someone on the other end of the phone, "Her Russian's good", and it is good enough now to answer back. But I felt physically ill again afterwards. Something spiralled downwards inside and I felt as though my battery had gone flat. God knows what my face looked like, but everyone who passed me did a double-take and looked again. However, it was quite an achievement actually to get in and read the thing.

I've been flogging off my empty jam jars at the Danilov Market to the honey and dairy traders. Fifty roubles on the nail. Not bad. I also took my jeans to the dry cleaners. As I'm leaving the area she offered to do them urgently and stuck 10 roubles in the back pocket for the driver. A bit of free enterprise between the two of them.

During the week I had lunch with the Portuguese Ambassador who was wanting to have Amnesty's material about the Caucasus. We ate our way through four years of Viktor's salary, but I have to say it was very nice. A plate of mixed cheeses in thin slices. Lovely. I've rehired Tolya on a new contract, and he has made me a bookend.

When I was in the office this week, unpacking more papers, he unexpectedly turned up to size up his next tasks. It's very nice to be back with his reliability and support. Tonight Zaure phoned from Kazakhstan: she's formed an Amnesty group in Alma-Ata. I felt immensely satisfied.

Friday 24 January

This was the morning that Sasha Lukin and I went to the Peruvian Embassy – a funny, dusty place, more like an obscure trade office than an embassy. They were a bit dismissive in their tone to begin with, but they weren't by the end. Sasha's been very good and conscientious about this and I enjoyed planning our tactics with him.

I stayed home the rest of the day waiting for the promised delivery of the six boxes from customs, which didn't come. They'd changed plans, but hadn't told me "because it's a zoo here". Very winning apology. I packed up the flat until about 11.00pm.

Saturday 25 January

End of a chapter, as I move from Bolshaya Serpukhovskaya Street. It was a beautiful day with a translucent sky. In the morning the massive milk queue suddenly took direct action and queued *across* the road, bringing the traffic to a halt. A row of women stood, ignoring the lorries revving at their left ear and, funnily enough, no one blew their horns. At the same time the church bells were tolling and I passed the young man up in the scaffolding, pulling the ropes. A nice scene to remember the place by.

Yelena's husband, Stanislav, came round at 2.00pm and was terrific, pulling the last things – and me – together. I had really been flagging. We were able to sit for a couple of hours over tea we'd brewed in a jam jar. The movers came at 4.00pm. The driver climbed in through my door because his wouldn't open, started the engine with two live wires, and we were off. As we bombed along Leninsky Prospekt with the Kaluga Gates looming up against the evening sky and the statue of Yury Gagarin in the distance, I suddenly felt excited about moving. When we arrived at the flat, however, there was rather an unfortunate series of understandings about the rent and my moving-in date: they had thought I would move in only on 1 February. I was sitting there wondering when they would leave and they must have been wondering the same about me. Eventually they left, although I would have been happier to go myself. It is a lovely flat but there is actually little space for office things. As I unpacked I decided this was a good thing, and that it is time to shift over to the office more.

Before they left, Misha began a sinister conversation with me which left me feeling very upset. He said how pampered the West is, and so how much weaker than Russia. "So don't think you're Number

One." He then quoted Bulgakov, to the effect that God punishes, but the devil smoothes your way. "I do you good, but I wish you evil." It was horrible. He thinks most people are animals. I think I was talking to a literal fascist.

Sunday 26 January

Yesterday's lovely weather continues. I spent the day out skiing in Kuskovo Park with Irina, and listening to Vysotsky with her and her mum. Irina was immensely kind: she knew I was tired out and upset by Misha's talk last night. Over lunch Natalya Ivanovna began musing over the political scene and blamed the West for being "deceived". Hearing another onslaught as the eponymous representative of the West made my heart just sink, but Irina stepped in and said, "Not *all* Westerners."

When I got home I drafted my next radio talk till midnight.

Monday 27 January

It's a good bed in this flat and I'm beginning to get over my fatigue. I borrowed money to give Misha as rent, and he came round with flowers.

At 3.00pm I met Natasha from the House of Architects to discuss a sign for the office. She's been in the wars. A water heater exploded and somehow burned off the hair on one side of her head. In August she'd also been in the underpass at Pushkin Square when the police let off some tear gas with no warning. She only got a sniff, when she turned and ran like everyone else, but she still sounds as though she has a heavy cold. It was just before the coup and she thinks they were practising. But in an underpass… ye gods!

At night Irina and I went to a good concert by the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra. They played a Schnittke piece, commemorating the bloodshed on 13 January 1991 in Vilnius. It was a bit trite, but sitting in that audience with everyone remembering the horrible atmosphere of those days and what happened later in Moscow, I was moved. Some people rose to their feet at the end. The orchestra ended with a fantastic quartet Shostakovich wrote about the Second World War. If you listen to that kind of thing in a British concert, it sounds a bit academic and you feel half the audience is struggling with the discordance. Here it was perfect.

Tuesday 28 January

Up at 7.00am to finish my radio piece, then over to "Memorial" to record it. They were pleased with the content, but I made an awful mess of reading it. I'm beginning to master that style of writing in Russian though.

At lunch I went across town to look at office furniture in a Polish shop. Disappointing. Irina came back to see the new flat. She has got an abscess in her gum and needs to have another tooth out, but can't

afford to deal with either, as it would cost over 500 roubles. People's health must really be deteriorating here. She said that although nothing is organised here or works to plan, there's a sense of organisation behind the chaos. I know what she means.

In the evening I did all the office accounts from November onwards. I've woken up almost every day with a dislocated jaw these past weeks. Probably tension. Today it lasted till 5.00pm and gave me a headache and pain in the back of the neck.

Wednesday 29 January

Last night I saw on TV that the new draft Russian Criminal Code will whittle the death penalty down to one or two crimes. The Lithuanian Embassy told me they've abolished it except for murder. I wonder if Amnesty played any part in this.

I don't really know why, but I'm feeling jaded and despondent about things. It is all just too much having to badger London and everyone here about everything. I'm losing the drive. It's partly because the underside of life is showing itself here. I gave my keys to the old flat back today, and the landlord said he'd shown someone round the flat on Sunday. How did he know I moved out on Saturday, unless he's connected to the people who listen to my phone? I'd overpaid him for one translation and so sorted it out today. He'd known but kept quiet about it, and today made excuses to cover his dishonesty. For devilment I spoke in English throughout the conversation and watched him struggling for words for a change.

Tonight I had a very strange phone call from a former prisoner, who has now moved back to Moscow from the USA. How did he know my new number? His questions were very nosy and odd.

The landlord told me he is now the Moscow representative of a Belgian humanitarian organisation. Help.

Thursday 30 January

There was a light blizzard all day and a zero-degree temperature. I had a productive time, changing money, getting my plane ticket and dropping in to *Izvestiya*, where Valery Rudnev told me the GKChP wives have appealed to Amnesty, and *Izvestiya* wants to publish our reply. Tricky.

I also had an appointment with the Central Prefektura about our rent, and am gratified that we have got the charity rate of 70 roubles. It involved five minutes' actual work, but I was there one and a half hours. It is a disgusting, shambolic place. A fight broke out in the queue, of the "Shut your face!", "You're a loony!" variety, among people who had been waiting for three hours. When I eventually got into the room, two secretaries were standing in the windows, applying their make-up and discussing their shopping with their backs to the room. So I sat there along with three men, who didn't say anything

the whole one and a half hours. Down the corridor a man was shouting and hitting things in an office.

The striking thing was that everyone who came in with an application was reasonable and intelligent, but none of them understood what they were supposed to be doing, or why. I certainly don't. Working like this must be so unsatisfactory for the people actually in the offices too. I noticed the phone was permanently off the hook, which explains why I can never get through.

In the evening Irina and I went to hear Yuly Kim singing at the Moscow Energy Institute. He did one song lasting about two hours called 'Moscow Kitchens', tracing the history of the human rights movement and ending with a roll of honour. A child burst into tears. I had to sit with a pair of gloves down the back of my neck, there was such a draught.

Desperate Donnegan says that Vasilyev, the head of the fascist Pamyat group, lives above the bread shop in Serpukhovskaya Street. Maybe that explains the chauvinistic sign in their window when the Leningrad singer, Talkov, was assassinated.

Knowing I'm leaving tomorrow, I was hit by a great wave of relief. I'm beset by problems I just can't solve and I'm glad to run away. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Bye!

POSTSCRIPT

Monday 17 February

This time I am trucking five lightshades with me, a roll of Amnesty posters and a ream of photocopying paper. I'll be glad not to do this anymore. Had beautiful flights, my luggage was second off the carousel, and a very civil cab driver immediately drove me home for roubles. Inside the flat I found everything had changed. Half the furniture had gone and two beds smelling stale and smoky had been put in the front room. I'll be glad not to be a tenant in someone else's flat anymore too.

The night news was interesting. I was struck by how much serious work is being put into the new situation all over the country. You don't necessarily get that impression from the foreign media.

Tuesday 18 February

The temperature has dropped to -16 degrees, but it was a bright, sunny day. It's very hard to keep energetic and enthusiastic about the string of bureaucratic things I have to do, which I don't understand and which seem to lead nowhere, very slowly. Today I planned to get the rent agreement stamped by PREO, REU and the Central Prefektura. Don't ask me what any of the initials mean because I haven't got a clue. At PREO they told me, "It's not that easy", and I have to phone them back at the end of the week.

There were forty-one good letters waiting for me at the post office, most of them in response to my *Sovetskaya Justitsiya* interview. My new landlord came round for the rent, showing me articles from the *Kommersant* newspaper and spreading doom about the economic situation. Occupational pastime of landlords.

The bright spot was a phone call from Tolya. He's installed the burglar alarm, found a fridge, and has started the palaver involved in getting us a phone. He'd also bought me an electric samovar which he knew I wanted. What a pal. He's trying to repair his flat at the same time, before moving out and letting it, so is frantically busy.

Wednesday 19 February

Spent another day waiting in for Amnesty's six boxes from Customs, which did not come.

I wrote about fifteen letters today. I was struck by the tone of the letters I get from prisoners. It's like an anonymous choir of protective voices, with some very sober comments about the present situation. Their letters really stand out from the others I receive.

In the evening I ate with Irina and her mother. Natalya Ivanovna has started sewing napkins to supplement their income. She did six in one evening and they are beautiful.

Thursday 20 February

I was given a carrot in my change today. Back in 1975 it was balloons. The exchange rate for foreign currency is now falling, presumably because of some central intervention to cut down the number of roubles swimming round. Meanwhile the prices are still rising. I no longer know what is cheap and what is exorbitant, because the old scale of values has disappeared.

Huge quantities of goods are on sale on the pavement at each metro, like an oriental bazaar, if it wasn't -16 degrees with snow on the ground. There are hunks of meat, huge cheeses, champagne, honey and mayonnaise. Tolya says some things in the market are now cheaper than in the state shops. I bought halva at the metro for 20 roubles and found it was stale. There was a news programme warning about diseased meat on the streets.

I took Amnesty material to Nikolay Vedernikov at the Russian Constitutional Court and he gave me tea and an hour's conversation, to my surprise. He also wanted to order me a car from their pool, as it was so cold, but I refused. It was an interesting chat, about life behind the scenes at the court. He seems genuinely responsive to any comments Amnesty wishes to make about the constitution, and gave me a copy of the court's judgements and also the draft Criminal Code. A nice young man carried my briefcase up and down the corridors, holding his jacket closed over a bulge at the waist. I asked him, "Is that a walkie-talkie?" – no reply – "Or a gun?" and he nodded.

Irina had managed to filch me a copy of the draft Russian Constitution from her library, so I photocopied it today, for 70 roubles. Then I did the rounds of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz embassies, delivering letters from London about Amnesty's imminent mission to Soviet Central Asia. I struck lucky with the Kazakhs and was shown straight to a young man in the Political Department who knew all about it. He was a political scientist and so forthcoming and pleasant that I'm sure he was very smart.

I got home about 3.00pm, and as is the trouble here, immediately fell asleep. Why is it so exhausting? Later I listened to English-language tapes Irina had lent me. A cut-glass voice was saying, "Avoid stress altogether and you put off that coronary for a few years." Odd tape. There was a section on relaxation but I never got to the end of it because I fell asleep again.

Thursday 21 February

Paid an early morning visit to Nina Petrovna, to take her relief money for some former prisoners of conscience. She was looking grey in the face and has to go away to a sanatorium for treatment for an irregular heartbeat. As usual I enjoyed my talk with her, and as usual she was funny and generous about everyone. She had been

interrogated in 1979 after the arrest of Tatyana Velikanova, the woman who edited the underground human rights journal, *A Chronicle of Current Events*. However, Nina Petrovna had written a statement in advance, refusing to testify, because she considered Tatyana Velikanova "to be an ideal person, incapable of a criminal act". Everyone says that about Tatyana Velikanova. She must be quite a person.

Nina Petrovna thinks that Soviet informers *should* be exposed, at least those who did it for money, as they actually got paid through their wage packets and are clearly traceable. However, the lists of their names should not be made widely public. She herself had been trying to change money, to provide relief for ex-prisoners, and was amused to see the window in the Savings Bank was called "Currency Operations". That was the exact wording of the old law forbidding currency dealings. True to form though, underneath the window, it said, "We have no money".

In the afternoon Natalya Ivanovna took me to her local furniture shop to buy a kitchen table and chairs for the office. Rather nice stuff, and not expensive. We had lunch together, and after Irina came back from work, tea. One of the Moscow Amnesty group had organised an exhibition of modernist photography, and so tonight I went along to the opening night. It was like stepping into Kensington, looking at the clothes and hairstyles on display.

In the few days I've been back, my jaw has dislocated again and the eczema has come back all over my thumb.

Saturday 22 February

One unpredictable effect of living here is that I now love Janis Joplin.

It's hard to distinguish the real situation here from people's reaction to it. Natalya Ivanovna and Irina were saying how they feel their sphere of freedom is gradually shrinking, which I found hard to believe – but today Tolya said, semi-joking, that before you had to have a pass to get to the Estonian coast, but now you need a visa just to get to Estonia. Viktor's mother says for the first time that she wants to emigrate. One of the last straws for her is that tickets to Lithuania are now 100 roubles, so they can no longer afford to go.

Irina and her mother were also affronted by TV pictures of the Salvation Army giving relief to people dressed like them. Lia Davidovna had got a box of food from her relatives in Australia, but sent through a Soviet firm, so it contained "Soviet" things like flour, rice, salt etc. She had burst into tears, finding it awful to be treated as though she's poor, and awful to be forced into poverty. She's sick of being paid in beetroots and potatoes, and wants money to decide for herself what she'll buy. This question of relief is an odd one. The place

is like a big baby being fed by the rest of the world.

It was desperately cold today. Tolya and I met early to sort out Amnesty's new PO box, then went over to the office and had a very productive five hours. He regulated the fridge, then waited with me for the kitchen furniture to arrive, and we assembled it together. Then we fixed all the lightshades, and finished with pancakes and cocoa at the local café. He's very thorough and inventive, and I enjoyed our time together. It really feels as though we are making progress.

The rest of my day was spent on social calls. First to Viktor where we had one of our nice peaceful talks together. Thence to the Teplitskys', for dinner, which we all ate with a lot of hilarity. Lena was agonising over her latest essay: "What does Tolstoy mean at the beginning of *Anna Karenina*, when he says, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord'?" Apparently they have a philosophical topic a week.

Sunday 23 February

My new flat is on one of Stalin's main avenues out of town, lined with five-storey brick house blocks whose ground floors are given over to shops. It feels Central European. Although the avenue is straight and rather boring, you can get almost anywhere through courtyards and little paths leading off the beaten track. My way to the metro is a nice path through gardens and up steps. Although there's thick snow, you always hear birds there.

Today I went exploring in the other direction. I took a path by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences and came out looking over the river, with a marvellous view of the city on the other bank and people skiing and tobogganing to my left on the Sparrow Hills. I climbed down and walked along the embankment path then did a big circle home. It was a lovely day and I enjoyed all the space and fresh air.

Father Nikon came round, looking thin and handsome, not having eaten for two and a half days, because he has absolutely no money. He has had it with here and applied for refugee status in Argentina, because he saw on TV that they'd opened a quota. I fed him for two and a half hours and enjoyed his visit.

The church where the Quakers now meet is right in the middle of the zone where people were demonstrating to mark the old USSR Armed Forces Day, so was cordoned off by rows of militia. Sasha Lukin climbed over a back fence to get in, and the rest of us talked our way through. Good meeting. A new man with a starved and tortured face, who I assumed was from the Russian provinces, turned out to be from California.

Afterwards I went through the underpass to the Rossiya Hotel to change money. The sound of a saxophone was wafting through the darkness, and on the other side of the street Russian flags were decorating the lamp posts every few yards and the Kremlin was

illuminated from below. The atmosphere was charged because of the demonstration. For the fifth day running there were no roubles to be had at the exchange kiosk. This is getting alarming as I'm down to my last 50 and have a lot of Amnesty expenses to meet.

Monday 24 February

I saw the Armenian ambassador today to ask for their death penalty statistics for London, and in the afternoon trudged back and forwards between the Central Prefektura and PREO, where I learned that before I get their seal I must get certificates from the gas and electricity boards, the fire inspectorate and the health and safety people.

But I was mentally elsewhere all day. I feel very dissatisfied with the stress I continually put myself under and the ridiculous business of doing work till 11.00pm. I read a Buddhist book on breathing and mindfulness in the evening, which was marvellous, and also wrote half my next radio programme.

Half the schizophrenics in Moscow seemed to call me tonight. Someone pointed out it was the full moon.

Tuesday 25 February

A beautiful day with hard snow underfoot. I began my trail of the fire inspectorate etc., and a good thing for the Buddhist book, because I kept calm and plodded on for eight hours, and quite enjoyed the different bureaucrats I met. With a sinking heart I discovered that before I started, I first had to go back to the Fund for Non-Dwelling Premises at Krasnopresnensky, to get three stamped letters. Their building is now quite transformed: it has a snazzy perspex stall in the lobby, and paratroopers in skin-tight jumpsuits defending the place at every corner.

From there I went to Tchaikovsky Street, past a sign saying "Danger – leaking gas", and into the Fire Inspectorate, which is a dilapidated hole. On to the Health and Safety people at Taganka, whose building stank like a toilet and was covered all over on the outside with some kind of cladding, so they looked like they were sitting in a tent. They were nice to me, but it turns out they won't accept letters. So I had to take mine to Dr Chirigyeva at Kuznetsky Most, in the town centre. I found her in a white coat, looking exhausted, with her dyed hair in a bandana and finger in a bandage. She reminded me of one of those exhausted, basically good doctors in *The First Circle*. She has to post the letter to the Taganka office, which in Moscow can take eight days.

From there I went to the Electricity Board on the embankment near the British Embassy. By this time some frozen cherries I had bought were defrosting, so I was dripping a trail of what looked like blood wherever I went. I must have walked about six miles in the

course of the day. The remarkable thing was that all these offices were connected to the old Krasnopresnensky District Soviet, although they covered half the city. Presumably each district must have its own set of electricity boards and fire inspectorates. Now I have to make appointments for inspectors at all these agencies to come and look round the office.

Wednesday 26 February

A hormonally chaotic day which I spent putting together the mailing for London, not really able to settle. In the evening Andrey had invited me to a booze-up with a group of ex-prisoners and their wives. I was terribly glad to have gone, and slept soundly afterwards. They also sold me some roubles, for which I was grateful. Amnesty in action: getting money from prisoners.

Andrey Shilkov was there and told me some more about Nina Petrovna, whom he also loves. She had started a relief fund for political prisoners before Solzhenitsyn did, raising the money from among her friends. For this she had not only been sacked from the Academy of Sciences Institute where she worked, but most recently from a cleaning job in 1986. He has been recording her stories of her life because he too fears she may be on the decline.

His teeth are still missing from where he was force-fed in prison and he is deeply interested in Buddhism and in Tibet. Somehow the combination of all these things makes me feel he has a hard-won, independent view of the world that is worth listening to. In the nicest way he was sceptical about Amnesty and its group-building orientation, and I felt there was a lot there for me to understand. On the way home he clutched my hand as he said goodbye, to show no hard feelings. I don't know on what grounds, but I feel an immense good friendship from him, Andrey, Ruslan and others. As though they like you despite, rather than because.

Thursday 27 February

I finished writing my radio programme in the morning and gave tea to Othmar and his sister, who were taking the mail. In the afternoon I learned that the Central Prefektura has lost the ground plan of our office, so I will have to go back to the Bureau of Technical Administration and get another one.

I went from there to Irina's birthday dinner, taking a bottle of Turkmenian madeira. We had a very good time with a lot of laughter, but it also felt valedictory. Natalya Ivanovna had sewn me a napkin with rowanberries on it, and raised her glass and said they were glad I had come into their house. I said I was too. We sat and looked through their old photos. Natalya Ivanovna was like Anne Bancroft in her youth.

Last thing at night there was a very disheartening email from

London, saying the delivery of office furniture has been held up.

Friday 28 February

The Fire Inspector surveyed the office today – a young, friendly guy from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who was reeking of vodka at 11.00am.

As money is still very short, I then went to the bank to claim the roubles that the actor Peter Gale has bequeathed to me from his account. I had got his letter translated, the translation stamped by Natasha Teplitskaya, and had brought my passport and visa with me as identification – but wouldn't you know, the transliteration of my name in the visa had a mistake in it which I had never noticed before. The bank staff pounced on it with glee.

Ninety minutes later I ended up with the manager and deputy manager, both of them young. He kept barking down the phone to people, "Well, that's your problem. There's a special form to follow!" SLAM! So I began thinking aloud and said to him, and to all bureaucrats all over Moscow, "You keep talking about a special form, but you never explain what it is." The deputy manager got furious at me for this and called me "Woman!" I tapped her knee and said, "Don't 'woman' me", and so she didn't. We all sat it out and the woman finally said she would sign my document. I congratulated her for taking the responsibility on herself, and the manager said, "No need for irony", bouncing his fists on the desk, but I think also pretty embarrassed that he hadn't dared to. I said I wasn't being ironic, I was being sincere, and I was. So, I got the 1,100 roubles. I hope the rouble famine soon ends, because there are big bills to pay.

Tolya invited me round in the evening, the night before he moves. He's under immense strain and doesn't seem happy at all. I felt sorry for him sitting in the relics of his flat, with a very uncertain future. He gave me tablets for my eczema and a piece of cake to take home with me. Last night Natalya Ivanovna had offered to get an alternative doctor to examine my jaw. She said he hadn't actually been able to help her, apparently, but that was because she was, she said, "a funny bugger". "Marjorie's a funny bugger too," cautioned Irina.

Professor Avetisyan and I also finalised the office statute today. He proudly showed me round his offices at a Western law firm in the centre of town, and took me right into the boardroom where the directors were having a meeting. Great culture clash, because he sat down and wanted me to "speak English with them". I think it was only because I was so obviously embarrassed that they contained their disbelief and annoyance and ordered us coffee. So, we spoke English together.

Saturday 29 February

Irina is immensely kind to me. She is painstakingly translating an anatomical diagram of feet for me, because she knows I am interested in doing a reflexology course when I go home. There is something very innocent about my friendships here, which reminds me of childhood friendships, and is lovely. I think it is maybe because people aren't transient so, unlike me, they don't have a host of floating associations in different countries, whose relative importance is not clear, even to me. If they like you they like you, and you come to the house and meet the family. They also talk about you and think about you a lot, and in a place like this, that is a lovely feeling.

We went to a concert in the Scriabin Museum, looked around the exhibits, then went to the twentieth-century photography museum and finally to see *Cinema Paradiso* at the Kino Centre. A nice day.

Sunday 1 March

Spring began today with a bright sun, a big thaw and mighty rushing of waters along the street. I must have been so keyed up this week that as I began to relax my body was sore and my brain was dead. I spent all day fretting about the delivery of office furniture and feeling extremely sorry for myself. I walked all along the embankment and into town to the Quakers, where I fell into a kind of trance and couldn't believe an hour had passed. There are more than twenty of us now, and some very good people among us. I felt very much better and came home and worked on the death penalty, to prepare myself for the duel with Professor Baskov in *Sovetskaya Justitsiya*.

Desperate Donnegan came round with his paper on Walter Pater, wanting my views on it. Somewhere from the midst of my gloom, I admire his intense enthusiasm for nineteenth-century English.

Monday 2 March

Today I took the Health and Safety Inspector round the office. She was a hefty woman, who swept over the rooms with one glance in three minutes. For this they were going to charge us 2,000 roubles, if I hadn't pleaded poverty. Because I was foreign she liked me and began showing me photos of her family, and talking about religion. Interesting: she was a paramedic, but had been to both Syria and Pakistan in the Brezhnev era.

I also tried to tackle our banking problems by opening up an account. The simplest thing would be to have a rouble account at the Savings Bank opposite the office, but they sent me up to their headquarters in Krasnopresnensky to get a letter of authorisation. The headquarters was distributed through an ordinary block of flats, oddly enough, so I came across a room of tellers counting notes furiously in what would normally be the basement area for rubbish. I was batted between two women who didn't want to deal with me, and finally both of them refused to let Amnesty open an account because we are

not a “small business”.

I came home via Pushkin Square where I picked up documentation from some HIV sufferers. After dinner I went out to Yelena’s place to return the saucepans I borrowed from them over a year ago. Yelena’s mother is being made redundant on 5 April. Their neighbour is going to all the right-wing demonstrations. Yelena gave me spare cardboard boxes for packing up my things and going back to London. So the crates which brought relief from the Solzhenitsyn Fund will be carrying out things for the Amnesty rep.

Everyone looked very tired, but it was a leisurely family evening as usual, with Yelena’s mother listening to the radio in the kitchen, and the baby asleep. Yelena and I played the piano to each other, using the music she had copied out by hand in exile. It was a very vivid picture: Yelena with her long dark hair and face slightly strained with the effort, baby’s bath on top of the china cabinet, and the room strewn with boxes of things for prisoners. Late twentieth-century woman, who has been exiled in her own country. I wonder what her daughter’s friends will remember about her in future years.

I had a new postman today: someone from the USA who is doing research into nuclear policy. He took Amnesty’s article to the *Journal of Asian and African Studies*.

Tuesday 3 March

Nice weather continues, with the streets like the seashore, continually running with little ripples of water.

Every time I try to buy something in the street, or flag down a car, some good-hearted woman leaps to my elbow and tells me not to because it’s too expensive, or tells me where I can get it cheaper round the corner. I don’t usually have time go round the corner, but feel inhibited to carry on buying there in the street. So I’m not getting very much at the moment.

Wednesday 4 March

Prepared this week’s courier and also got myself ready for an interview on China tomorrow at the Russian World Service. Took the afternoon off and went with Irina to see an exhibition at 28 Malaya Gruzinskaya, the place where they held underground art shows during Brezhnev’s times. From there we walked up to Chekhov’s museum at the house where he used to practise medicine, now on the Garden Ring. Whichever museum you go into, you always find Shalyapin and Gorky gracing the photos, like something out of *Jennifer’s Diary*.

In the evening Simon Cosgrove came round to take away my cups and glasses. I’m starting the pruning for moving.

Thursday 5 March

Since I’ve read about Buddhist “mindfulness” I’ve left my handbag overnight at the Sannikovas’, and this morning I locked myself out of

the flat. Obviously being too “mindful”.

I had an early morning appointment with Nikita at the Moscow City Justice Department, to ask his advice about how we register with the Russian authorities. I’m afraid we are straddling two horses, going along simultaneously as a “charity” with the Moscow Mayordom, and as a “foreign business” with the Russian government. He thinks so too. He gave me an hour of his time, looking up decrees and phoning contacts. At one point he sat with a phone at each ear, discussing decrees down one, and some bargain food down the other.

Afterwards I did an interview with Kirill Mikhailov at the World Service and he took me for lunch. His questions were all very general about human rights, but very interesting. The interview will be broadcast to China, North Korea, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Friday 6 March

I’ve just had Andrey round for dinner. With a face deadpan with embarrassment he brought me a present for Women’s Day. He said when he first started practising “mindfulness” he almost fell under a bus. He’s an immensely attractive man.

The cost of mailing stuff to London has gone up to 900 roubles (!) from 30 last January. Othmar and I were hard pushed to assemble the cash. In the afternoon I visited the Trans-National Radical Party to share Amnesty’s material on the death penalty. Although they have a pleasantly anarchic philosophy, they are also down to business and I like talking to them. I also got an appointment with the Electricity Board to survey our office.

Saturday 7 March

Irina and I continued our tour of Moscow graveyards. Today we walked down to Novodevichy monastery. Although it was only zero degrees and there was no wind, it was deadly cold for some reason. A chill seemed to rise up between the graves. There were nice modest graves for Chekhov and Bulgakov and then as you approach the 1970s section, there are more and more giant heads of nobodies on big pillars. Ex-President Gromyko is lying next to ex-Chief Ideologist Suslov. How ghastly to be buried together. They probably hated each other in real life.

We then went on a search for bread for me, stopping en route in a grocery store on Kropotkin Street, which had a nice display of fish, cheese, jams, booze, butter and meat. Even though the prices are stupendous, there is definitely more around, and it is a relief to the eye.

Irina came back for soup and beer, and we listened to my Philip Glass tape: minimalist electronic music called *Life Out of Balance*. When you listen to that and look at Yury Gagarin’s statue outside the window, like some insistent silver boy, it seems a perfect match.

After she left I caught up with *Izvestiya*. Shevardnadze has gone back to Georgia and Mutalibov has resigned in Azerbaidzhan. The situation seems wide open in both countries.

Sunday 8 March: Women's Day

Today is also Forgiveness Sunday in the Russian Orthodox Calendar and the day before the Lenten fast begins, so it was pancakes, pancakes all the way.

I took my vacuum cleaner to give to Misha's wife, and we had a fine time with wine over lunch. She told me that the father of Yegor Gaidar, the Finance Minister, was a national hero in the Second World War, and at school they used to sing a song about him called 'Gaidar in the Frontline'! Now people are sending in ironic letters to the radio about the young Gaidar and his economic reforms, saying he should be in the frontline too.

The Quaker meeting was very fine today. Afterwards I talked with Marina, who's a psychologist devising recommendations for reconciliation in ethnic conflicts. The trouble is, they have no one to send their recommendations to. I told her how I'd learned that losing my temper seems to work in office here, but I don't know how to square it with other things I believe in. She said, "You have to shout, because it's the only thing they understand", and then we both laughed, because she doesn't know how to square it either.

Felt surrounded by great warmth and affection. Misha Roshchin had brought me an inscribed book; Sergey the electrician had brought me a tulip and a book. I was kissed by the elder in the Russian Orthodox Church who handles the key.

Monday 9 March

I've three weeks left and in that time I have to pack and ship my things; do interviews with *Izvestiya*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and *Sovetskaya Justitsiya*; and tie up the rent agreement for the office. Hit the road with renewed energy.

The electricity inspectors were round at the office in the early morning. It turns out that the Moscow Electricity Board has no meters (!) and so we have to find and install our own. Tolya is working on getting us a phone, and said that to get it quickly we need to give the secretaries a "present". I went to a hard currency shop and bought a big tin of foreign biscuits. We also need to chivvy up the Health and Safety people, and I actually contemplated giving the inspector the flowers I had bought – but decided against starting on this path. However, when I saw her sitting in her bleak room, I offered her a carnation to cheer it up and we exchanged a complicated sort of look. I then went back to the Bureau of Technical Administration to pick up our replacement ground plan for the office. They hadn't done it – but something seems to have changed there. The doors are open, people

are busy and they were full of pleasant apologies for keeping me waiting.

A funny thing today: I popped back into the flat at midday, picked up the phone, and the mouthpiece reeked of vodka. First time I've noticed anything strange in the new flat. I wonder who, and when. When I picked up Amnesty's letters from the PO box, several were torn open and one arrived closed, but empty.

Tuesday 10 March

This was a bit of an endurance test. The morning went on paying bills to the Electricity Board and telephone station, then doing the ninety-minute-round hike to the photocopying shop. In the afternoon the Armenian Embassy called me in to give me their death penalty statistics, and I went on the search for my train ticket home to the UK. I had three false starts, then eventually found a bureau that would sell tickets to a foreigner with a credit card, travelling on their own, across the border. It's on Petrovka Street. It was a two-hour wait in the queue, and I listened to two women behind me discussing how they were travelling to "capitalist countries". I asked them what they called a "capitalist country" nowadays. One of them looked at our empty service desk and said bitterly, "Capitalist countries are where they sell tickets."

After she saw my visa and that it was issued by the Foreign Ministry, the ticket woman became immensely ingratiating and almost flirtatious. It was quite nauseating while she was flicking away Russian customers at the same time.

In the evening I wound up at Tolya's for another exchange of bills and papers. By this time it was 9.00pm. I wondered which woman would be with him this evening, but he was alone and thoroughly enjoying the space and solitude of his empty flat.

Wednesday 11 March

This was one of those days that went on castors and totally lifted my spirits. The six boxes arrived from Customs! Only five months late.

Two editors from a law journal in Yaroslavl outside Moscow rolled up unexpectedly, with proposals for cooperation with Amnesty. He was a people's deputy for his region and she had taught law to one of the judges on the Russian Constitutional Court. They were very middle of the road, but for that reason very interesting. They think repression is on the increase in Yaroslavl and fear their paper will be shut. They described the coup as a "fight between clans" and said it had nothing to do with Yaroslavl. They were simply forced without a moment's notice to take sides. Words like democracy, "right" and "left", have no relevance to today's situation, according to them. I see what they mean.

In the afternoon I managed to change £100; pay more bills;

collect a decree from Nikita at the Moscow City Justice Department; and – most amazing of all – get an estimate of the utility charges our office will have to pay from a pleasant woman economist at the REU office.

Zaure is visiting Moscow from Alma-Ata, and I spent the evening with her at her friends' house. We had a splendid dinner, then Zaure read our fortunes in our coffee cups, using the opportunity to say what she really thought of us. One of the women fared rather badly. Zaure said to me, "The easy part of your life is behind you." Blimey.

I enjoy these easy and daft Russian evenings. Zaure is a bit of a riddle. She has the easy and constructive manner of some intelligent women who did quite well in the Party, and she's also got their puritanism and idealism. She has apparently pushed her sister into becoming a broker in the commodity exchange, which is in Alma-Ata's old Palace of National Economic Achievements. When she said this a delightful, ironic and enigmatic expression passed over her face. I would love to know what she was thinking at that point.

Thursday 12 March

Tolya was round at 8.00am to collect receipts and go to the telephone exchange. He has managed to beat down our installation bill. He's certainly being an immense help.

After preparing the mailing for London in the morning, I went to the office to interview a man who is convinced he's being persecuted by the KGB. Most of the country seems to be sick with this feeling. He was the director of an institute and had a good and intelligent face. As a director he'd spent his working life literally surrounded by KGB people on his staff and in his circle of acquaintances. At a certain point he became obsessed with the idea that someone was going through his flat, papers and fridge. Everything he said I notice in myself and in other people here. Eventually he tried to drown himself, but couldn't because he was a good swimmer.

The poor guy then went to the police station and asked them to arrest him, to stop this threatening feeling. So they did, and he was put in a psychiatric hospital. The water there had been turned off and all the cups of all the various slobbering patients were being washed in the same bowl of water. He tried to bolt, so they pumped him full of drugs. I think he was a bit off his hinges, but it was hard to separate reality from paranoia, and most of his reactions to me were totally understandable. It was obvious that he didn't trust me either. I opened the window because it was hot and he kept turning to it nervously, as though there was a microphone hidden outside.

Irina and I went to see the actress Margareta Terekhova opening the premier of her new film, *We Are Not Mad Men*. It was an evening when I was terribly impressed by Irina's comments on people and on

acting. From within her four walls there's this great big brain following and absorbing everything. Her phone keeps being cut off and is drowned with background noises.

Friday 13 March

I think Tolya and I spent the day in futile bureaucratic pursuits. Eight hours later he rang to say the Electricity Board now wants us to produce architects' plans for the houses *next* to our office, to find out where the electricity cables are. *!*^?

Andrey came round for dinner and told me about his hunger strike in psychiatric hospital. Apparently he was in Abramtsevo. When he found out my brother is a psychiatrist, the cup which was nearly at his lips came down to the table with a bang. "Sorry, involuntary reaction," he said.

Saturday 14 March

Helena came out to visit from the UK today and I picked her up from the airport. Her arrival started an odd chapter with Russian friends, as I discovered. Irina was round for lunch beforehand and I wanted them to meet, but Irina didn't want to. All the more touching that she bought us both tickets for a Chekhov play on Wednesday night.

Sunday 15 March

I locked us out of the house again. More "mindfulness" on my part. After taking Helena to the Danilov monastery, the market and the Quakers, we went round to Viktor's place for his mother's birthday party. They lived up to eccentric form, showing Helena the carrier bag with his grandmother's ashes in it.

Viktor's mother told me that from now on I must speak only English with Viktor, to give him practice. I accidentally said something in English to her, and a blank look passed over her face, before she said royally, "But to me you may speak Russian." Viktor says he is reading only English now, because it gives him "less information". He's drowning in all the news. Me too.

I worked until 2.30am, sending emails to London.

Monday 16 March

Helena struck out into town on her own, with only my map and her English vowels to save her from destruction.

I did more mailings, then met Irina briefly to pick up our theatre tickets. She was going to interpret for a group of young scientists from the USA, who are visiting her medical research station and are anxious to share statistics on AIDS, rabies etc. The paper in Russian, which they had sent in advance, had got lost in the office, no one had read it, and the office were totally unprepared for their visit. Irina was embarrassed at the berkish questions she was having to interpret. It sounds like something from Gogol.

Helena had wanted to meet Andrey, so he came round for dinner. Here began another unexpected awkwardness. She was telling him about her old job, and how human rights groups used to compete for funds to do projects in South Africa. Andrey said, “Why?”, and I watched the cultural gap open between them and never close. Helena was furious, but too polite to argue and also sorry not to be getting on with a friend of mine. Andrey didn’t mind if they got on or not, and that too was a cultural difference. I realised it is marvellous having Russian friends, but it has never been painless.

Tuesday 17 March

Big tension was expected in Moscow today, as members of the old Soviet Parliament assembled to agitate for a return to the old USSR. Although I saw red flags and some knots of people outside the Moskva Hotel, they were smaller than the crowds selling shoes and shirts round the corner at Kuznetsky Most. Moscow’s becoming like New York. If you’ve got the money you can buy champagne at 6.00am and a jumper at 11.00pm. You see huge throngs in the street, which last year would have been a pro-Yeltsin gaggle. This year it is traders standing in lines along the pavements with pedestrians slowly moving through, trying on this or beating down the prices for that. The bottom of Gorky Street, Kuznetsky Most and the Lubyanka are almost impassable. It is certainly good to see cheese – and different varieties too – beer, and wines up from Tajikistan and Karabakh. There was nothing like it last year.

Today I was supposed to meet the paranoid man again in the office, but would you believe it the telephone engineers decided to install our phone there today. Tolya asked them to postpone it, to save the man’s nerves.

There’s a settlement of Old Believers’ Churches just east of Taganka – the Rogozhsky settlement – and this morning Misha Roshchin, a Quaker who is also an Old Believer, took Helena and me round it. They had refused to accept new church rulings in the 1500s, in particular the introduction of crossing yourself with three fingers not two. Hard to believe, but true, and they and their clergy went through years of persecution because of it.

The church was absolutely beautiful. They have kept to the old canons of icon painting and do not use electricity, so have a splendid eighty-four-piece candelabra in burnished metal hanging before the altar. There is a massive wooden scaffold on wheels which they use for lighting the candles. A woman was lovingly sweeping the wooden floor and other old ladies were sitting in the peace and quiet in the sunlight which was streaming in through the windows.

I was quite entranced by the sense of devotion, until a thin old lady in felt boots marched across the church at a fair clip, crossed

herself profusely en route past the icons, and screamed that she'd seen me holding my hands behind my back. I begged her forgiveness and she said, "The Lord *may* forgive you", but there again he might not. Helena, who was lounging by some shroud, smartened herself up pretty sharpish.

At night I sat between Andrey and Helena at an organ concert, by this time neither of them making much attempt to be friendly with each other. From the back view the organist looked as though he was breakdancing during the complicated bits. As we parted Andrey gave me beetroots and homemade cake from his briefcase. I think that's the thing about friendships here. You don't get to know someone through conversation, so much as going through similar problems and helping each other. Conversation comes later. If Helena lived here I think she and Andrey would get on quite differently.

Wednesday 18 March

Today I decided to get our certificate from the Health and Safety people, whatever it took. Yesterday I'd gone for a preliminary recce to the Health Department where, after bawling me out, a woman said quite reasonably, "You know, we're under no obligation to give you one, we've a thousand other things to do." "Well, why are we under an obligation to get one then?" I asked. "Because it's a stupid system and totally stuck in a rut," she said. She reckoned it would take us a month to get it.

Today I went to the Chief Doctor's office at Kuznetsky Most, where I had first registered our application. There were two receptionists – a man and a woman – sitting in white coats, and one other client sitting in silence. I asked the woman if she could check the register to see what stage our certification has reached. She went barmy and shrieked that it was a waste of her time. I said quietly that it was a waste of my time if she didn't, and an electric charge went through the room. I said I was prepared to wait, got out my *Izvestiya* and read it for forty minutes, aware out of the corner of my eye that her nerve was beginning to crack. She rang someone about me and said, "She's sitting here, as bold as brass…", and then finally she looked up her blasted register and told me the certificate was across town at their Taganka office, waiting to be typed.

I went over there and found the very nice solitary secretary sitting in the basement, who immediately whipped out her paper and typed up our certificate there and then. Back to Kuznetsky Most, where by this time the woman receptionist had gone and I was treated to the old man, who breathed heavily through his mouth and whispered as he wrote. Still the silence reigned, although I heard him tell a new client that it was pandemonium: they were "never off the phone" and there was "a constant stream" of people coming to see them. True, the

phone did ring once while I was there and the old man answered, "Rats? They're not us! Ring so and so."

He told me the Chief Doctor was out and would be back very, very late, maybe about 7.00pm. I took out *Izvestiya* and said I would wait. In fact she was back in about twenty minutes, spent half an hour giggling with her pal, then signed and stamped my certificate. She was young and the office was heavy with the smell of flowers – obviously a bribeworthy person.

All this took over four hours and it's hard to keep in mind that it has anything to do with human rights. It is also hard to be human and reasonable with people who are only doing their jobs, while at the same time you feel utter contempt for the system, the work and the aggressive, cowardly and lazy attitude it breeds.

Helena and I went to see *The Cherry Orchard* at the Moscow Arts Theatre. Shcherbakov, the main actor, had died and there were flowers laid on the windowsills, and a short, moving tribute to him at the start. The British actress Caroline Blakiston was playing the governess, and although she had a tiny part, it became her show, as though she was the compère in *Cabaret*. Extraordinary and not really a success.

Thursday 19 March

Today was a very beautiful spring morning and I took Helena down to the Kolomenskoye monastery and then to the lovely icon exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery. We came back, lazed and bathed, then I took her up to the station in time for her night train to St Petersburg.

Tolya has managed against the odds to get the ground plans of our neighbours' offices for the electricity cabling, but the Electricity Board has said it will not give us our certificate for a month. So we can't get our furniture from London, we can't get our rent agreement and the order on our premises, and I learned today that the professor who was supposed to be my sparring partner has backed out of the death penalty round table with *Sovetskaya Justitsiya*. Apparently he doesn't want to go public and in particular does not want to argue with a foreigner. Since we would have been arguing in Russian, I should have thought he would be at an advantage. This last six-week stint is turning out disappointingly anti-climactic.

Friday 20 March

With Helena safely in St Petersburg, Irina reappeared and even took me up to the station to see me off on the night train to Leningrad. The delegation of US scientists has now finished its visit to her institute. They were young, had streaming colds, and looked in a bad way. Irina said people at the institute had decided they were spies and had even held a meeting about it, and resolved not to give away

any secrets. Irina said all this was to cover the fact that no one had turned a hand to prepare for their visit. Welcome to 1992 and the world fight against AIDS. The Institute Director had asked Irina what she thought about the delegation. Irina said it was no secret that Russian medicine was decades behind the West, so what on earth could they have been spying on? This is what I like about her. She's a minority of one, and honest in a dishonest world.

I had got all my boxes of belongings ready for shipping and spent the day tied to the house, waiting for a driver who didn't come. He finally rolled up at 8.30pm, just as we were leaving for the train.

Saturday 21 March

St Petersburg is also packed with traders. I bought Lyuda and Viktor a bottle of coffee liqueur at 6.30am, then joined them for our last cognac breakfast.

I had gone there to say goodbye to them, but in the end we set off so late for my return train that I suddenly had to bolt for it without saying a word to them. I only caught it because it was two minutes late, and I found Helena on board, about to sail off to Moscow on her own with no key and not a word of Russian. Felt ill for about an hour after the run.

Sunday 22 March

Helena went back home to the UK today, but before then we had a raucous and boozy lunch at the Teplitskys'. Natasha had given her English-language pupils some advertising slogans to match up with pictures. When she produced, "It's the very best way to start the day…", all her pupils had pointed to the picture of a bottle of cognac.

In the evening I went to John Crowfoot's, to get his verdict on a translation of some memoirs I have done for him. I think he must have slated it in private, because his wife fussed round me with food, as though she was trying to soften the blow, and for the first time addressed me as "ty". To me, however, he restricted himself to saying that my style is very dry. "You do read books, don't you?" he asked concernedly. It felt a bit hollow insisting, "Yes, honest," when there was obviously no evidence of it. Years of Amnesty style leaving their mark, I think.

There were around twenty people at the Quakers, among them two visitors from the US, who immediately dominated the conversation afterwards with loud reminiscences of Colorado. Seventeen interesting Russians sat in silence. It is hard to imagine two Russians coming to a Colorado Quaker meeting and instantly taking over. I got quite angry, and depressed too.

Monday 23 March: My last week in Moscow

A death penalty case from Krasnodar is due to come before the Russian Supreme Court this week. Today the lawyer asked to meet

me. She is a middle-aged lady and former Secretary of her District Party Committee, who was staying in Moscow with an acquaintance. She had read about Amnesty in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and the acquaintance had seen the Human Rights Day slot on TV. So it seems our publicity has been reaching middle Russia. The lawyer was intensely nervous about her case.

Afterwards I said my goodbyes to Natalya Vysotskaya, sitting on a bench in a park. She is totally burned out. We realised all our conversation is about rapists, murderers, arsonists etc. we know in common, and it made us quite giggly.

Tuesday 24 March

Since laundry prices were freed, the laundries have apparently stopped doing their "express" (i.e. five-day) service. I eventually tracked down a laundry, handed the stuff over, then found out it will only be ready on 8 April, when I'm already in London. Took it all back and had to cart it with me to lunch at the Café Orient with a visitor from the human rights group, Helsinki Watch. It was the first time I'd met her and privately I was waiting for the moment when, like other US visitors over here, she would tell me how much she loves her own country. However, it turns out she is strongly against the death penalty and said of the USA: "Talk about arrogance and complacency!"

In the evening I returned bedding to Yelena and her mother. They each staggered to the front door, looking the worse for wear, and I discovered they had an exhausting stranger visiting them: an ex-prisoner who recited Valentin Zek's poetry at the drop of a hat. We were all inventing pretexts to call each other out of the room and get a break from him.

Wilhelm Fast from Tomsk was also visiting them. He'd been at the Congress of Soviet Germans, which is getting increasingly militant about Yeltsin's treatment of them. Wilhelm will also be going to the Congress for an Independent Siberia. They want to own all their own resources and ban foreign investment. Although I could understand their wish for autonomy I didn't understand the economic thinking, and when I asked him about it he didn't seem to either. It was like some eighteenth-century idea of a static "common weal", based on land.

By contrast, today I passed a row of old ladies in the metro, who were selling the *Financial Gazette* and *Guides to Taxation*. When I picked up my mail from the old flat I also overheard the landlord negotiating a lorryload of Belgian goods from St Petersburg docks. All changed days since last year. It's changed so much, you feel there's either some strong mercantile instinct getting its head, or that it's totally superficial and can be swept away at a stroke.

Trade has fallen so dramatically for my old laundry since the price rises that its two departments have been knocked into one and half the premises are now for rent.

Wednesday 25 March

I went out early to visit the Russian Supreme Court, which was hearing the Krasnodar death penalty case on appeal in open session. A woman in a blue cardigan unlocked the courtroom and shouted at the defence lawyers, "Are you just having a get-together, or are you here for the trial?" This was the prosecutor.

It was a fascinating trial to watch, though I've read about them a thousand times. One judge read a book and periodically looked out of the window. The Chair of the Bench interrupted the defence, the prosecutor interrupted the chair, and also insisted on having first look at any papers the defence intended to hand to the bench. At one point the chair literally exchanged looks with the prosecutor and rolled her eyes heavenwards. Presumption of innocence rules OK.

When the judges retired to deliberate, a bitter squabble broke out between the prosecution and the defence, at quite a personal level. The prosecutor said she was happy to hear a defence speech, as long as it didn't "distort the truth". She also said that anyway, if there had been a jury, they would have voted for a death sentence in the case too. That's a point: why was there no jury at the first trial? The judges upheld the death sentence. That's probably how people are condemned to death the world over.

Anna Bochko and Viktor came round for a joint English lesson in the evening and were marvellously funny in acting out scenes together. We had cake and cognac, and laughed a lot. It was goodbye.

I did my big *Izvestiya* interview this afternoon.

Thursday 26 March

I ate four meals in rapid succession today. Nina Petrovna invited me to breakfast to say goodbye. She told me how she'd been beaten up in her fifties, she reckons by the KGB. As she left her institute in the evening a young man reeking of vodka came up and started chatting, then beat her up in cold blood, breaking her nose and jaw. You must need to get drunk to beat up an elderly lady without provocation. She kissed me goodbye.

Straight after lunch at the Soros Foundation, I had another meal with the defence lawyer from Krasnodar, now wanting to help Amnesty in any lawyers' actions we do. Really, these personal contacts bear some of the best fruit.

Dashed home just in time to prepare a meal for Irina, come straight from work, and then we went to a wonderful concert of Metner, Rachmaninov and Scriabin, played by the Tchaikovsky Prize runner-up, Vladimir Ovchinnikov. It was nervy and brilliant and for

that reason I found it terribly Russian. Irina found it very Russian too and I asked why. She thought, then said, “Because it is inconclusive sound.” She was tired and unhappy, I think. She says she feels there’s less and less oxygen to breathe. We walked home sharing an umbrella in the rain. She says she won’t see me off when I go.

Friday 27 March

What a day. I worked at home and had a stream of people delivering and collecting papers and documents by the hour. Father Nikon came round in the early evening. It’s funny, whenever he is on a high, he starts talking about marketing his hair-removing preparation.

Saturday 28 March

Today I had to move my filing cabinet and twelve more boxes from the flat to the office. Siffra nicely came round with her car and we sweated up and down the stairs. When we got to the office Tolya arrived to help us with the carrying, and to put up shelves.

Viktor had said he would collect my armchair today. When I got home a Dickensian man in black Homburg and long black coat was hovering round my door. He produced his card from his waistcoat, and offered to help me in any way possible. It turned out he owns warehouses and two docks, and is the head of vegetable and fruit distribution in Moscow. Would that I had known earlier! Though why he was collecting my chair for Viktor is a mystery.

I went to Irina and her mother’s for dinner, and then Irina and I had an evening’s jazz at the Paveletsky Cinema: Keith Jarrett and Wynton Marsalis. I’m resisting any morbid goodbyes with Irina and her mum.

Sunday 29 March

Some Lithuanians are asking for help for the relatives of the people killed in Vilnius in January 1991. I went to collect their list of names, and then had a late breakfast with Elena and her family, and we reminisced about how we met in 1989. They gave me a beautiful wooden Siberian honey pot, and want to see me off at the station.

I checked over my *Izvestiya* interview in the afternoon with Valery Rudnev and said goodbye to the Quakers. Irina and I met to look round Tolstoy’s museum-house. Rather a gloomy old hole.

Monday 30 March

John Crowfoot took me up to meet Semyon Vilensky, the man who compiled the prison memoirs which I will be helping to translate. He told me what my author was like as a person and I got very enthused by the whole project. My woman was the most realistic and most reserved of the group, apparently, and wrote her own memoir only because she disapproved of the sentimentalised memoirs of her friends.

I spent the afternoon at home packing and receiving a stream of visitors, who were literally passing in the hallway. I finished my last bit of computing, then struck north to Hella and Siffra for dinner and to say goodbye. At about 11.20pm I got round to Irina and her mother's to deliver my computer and the office money for safekeeping, until my replacement arrives.

Natalya Ivanovna went to bed, and we sat up talking and drinking port until 2.00am.

Tuesday 31 March

I hardly slept. Irina hardly slept because she was on the floor. Natalya Ivanovna hardly slept because she got up at 6.00am to bake me food for my journey. She went to bed and conked out while Irina and I ate breakfast. Then it was time for goodbye. We all sat in silence for the journey, Russian-style. Natalya Ivanovna took my face in her hands and gave me double kisses on each cheek. Irina went limp and somehow wasn't there. We were all smiling with serious faces, and that was my last glimpse of Natalya Ivanovna, as the lift door slid shut. Very very good people, who really opened themselves to me.

A frantic day of emptying the PO box, buying and installing a phone, saying goodbye to Tolya, collecting articles from *Izvestiya*, and taking my leave of my landlord and the Desperate Donnegans.

From 2.00 to 5.00pm I packed like a loony, helped by Andrey. We too sat in silence for the journey, then he carried all my heavy stuff out to the taxi and on to the train at Belorussia station.

As we waited in the sunshine up came a delegation from the Moscow College of Advocates, bringing flowers; then Viktor, bringing me a tray. At the last moment Yelena ran up, beaming and beaming, and inviting me to come on holiday with them next year. At a distance from her stood Andrey, dark and deadpan. They actually have a lot of friends in common, but don't know each other. I leaned out of the window and said, "I don't want to leave", and Andrey gestured me to come back. The only person missing was Irina. As the train pulled out I suddenly felt immensely tired and burst into tears.

I shared a compartment with Igor, a Soviet businessman working in Germany, who had been back home for his father's funeral and was steadily slugging his way through the vodka. Spent much of the ride on my back looking up at the window. Except for the odd trees, it was empty in Russia and Poland. In Germany it was crossed with electricity wires and pylons. Suddenly a statue on horseback leapt out and filled the frame in Belgium. Everything seemed much more crowded the further west we got. As I raised my head above the parapet at a German station I was astonished at how sexless all the women looked. Not masculine, but sexless. Really a different world, or culture.

I was the only passenger across Belgium and drifted into nice chats with the two Soviet guards, who brought me their tape deck and played me Yesenin's poetry. I gave them a picture and they gave me flowers, before helping me with my luggage at Oostende dock. Like Igor, they thought the August coup was not significant – simply a baronial fight in Moscow, which has really changed nothing, That seems to be the accepted wisdom now, as I've heard it from several quarters before, and it seems quite true to me. But perhaps the significant things in history are precisely the things that stay the same, and that does not discount the coup.

When the boat train arrived in Victoria station there was not a trolley in sight, nor a porter. I hung around with my bags for close on forty minutes, accompanied the while by a chatty guard. I asked him if he would help me carry things for a tip. "Oh no, it's more than my job's worth," he actually said. Oh, happy isle!

PHOTOGRAPHS

Marjorie at Amnesty, old Southampton Street building, old electric typewriter

Marjorie, Andrey Sakharov, Anne Burley, Moscow 1987 at the Sakharov's flat

Making for the road outside Sakharov's flat

Red Square on the last October Revolution Day celebrations USSR, 1990

The Coup, BTRs in the Manezh, August 1991

The Manezh in 1991 (hardly a car in sight)

Herzen Street (now Bolshaya Nikitskaya) the chosen site of the AI office, 1991

Ian Martin and Marjorie outside the entranceway to A1 stair

Renovating the AI office (kitchen), 1991

AI's seminar on the death penalty

AI's seminar on the death penalty

Rooftops of central Moscow, 1991

Traffic at the end of Marjorie's road in 1991

Marjorie's kitchen in Serpukhovskaya St. with her beloved balcony

Marjorie in Kolomenskoye, late 1990s

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marjorie Farquharson worked in the field of human rights and the USSR and post-Soviet States for over 30 years. She was the Amnesty researcher on the USSR at the International Secretariat from 1978 – 1992 and Amnesty International's first representative in the Soviet bloc, worked as the Director of the EU TACIS project, worked in 44 of Russia's federal regions as a Council of Europe Officer, and helped establish a regional ombudsman institution there. She has been a freelance researcher, writer and translator since 2001 and worked in all 5 Central Asian States.

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Notes

1

A Russian historical and civil rights society (NGO) which focuses on recording and publicising the Soviet Union's totalitarian past, but also monitors human rights in Russia and other post-Soviet states.